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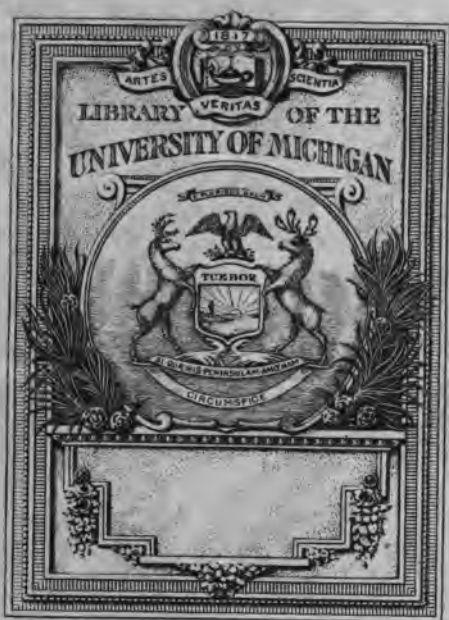
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A VAGABOND IN ARTS.

VOL. III.

A VAGABOND IN ARTS

BY

ALGERNON GISSING

AUTHOR OF

A MOORLAND IDYL, 'A VILLAGE HAMPDEN,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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A VAGABOND IN ARTS.

CHAPTER I.

TWO LETTERS.

It was a cold, wet night, and Shiel came in very weary, body and soul. In this mood the intolerable vulgarity of his domicile struck him with such exceptional vehemence, as he put a match to the lamp, that one impetuous gust from his lips extinguished it, and he flung himself into the arm-chair in the dark. There he gnawed his soul in silence.

His yesterday's interview with Handsel had had exactly the opposite effect from that expected, and at this moment the whole problem of the world seemed reopened, the feverish stress of recent months but a futile delirium. From the sting of that girl's placidity could he perceive something of the ignominy of his predicament, the purely reactionary aspect of his present employment. But as yet this could do little but exasperate. If he had ever affected to behold in this work a practical protest against his former revolt, by the light of these intuitive flashes he could see it more plainly, and knew it to be far other than an incipient adjustment to the world of fact. It could not be disguised that the whole effect had been flagrantly retrograde. So far from gathering sym-

pathy with the human comedy, and perceiving within it any possible foothold for his own ebullient energies, he knew that he the more utterly loathed it, and resisted its shackles with a more savage intensity. He had only to measure his progress by the degree of composure with which he could recall the image of Augusta, and the ringing music of her voice. Summoning her to-night the sensation was maddening, and he got up to prowl about in the darkness. He had conquered nothing.

But his emotion was of a very complex quality, and by no means the mere result of gratification frustrated. It was the contest of two worlds, with his own soul for the arena.

There was a time when Shiel viewed his very isolation as a source of power; but

he so viewed it no longer. Never did he invoke that fascinating image without knowing himself overwhelmingly alone. Something therefore he had to thank Miss Lavington for, however questionable he may have held the service ; for is not solitude the spring to all the social virtues ?

As he verged consciously towards this intolerable sense, pacing in the darkness, a double knock at the house-door reverberated through the building, and of a sudden the man's reflections were unaccountably shattered. That very mundane summons seemed to recall him to the world, and, once again striking a match, he prepared to put it to his lamp. As he was doing so, a letter was brought in to him, and laid upon the table. He muttered an acknowledgment, and the child

withdrew, staring at him all the time. Shiel's hand visibly trembled as he adjusted the glass chimney, and there was an impetuosity in his movements. He snatched up the envelope and tore it open, with an unnatural grin upon his lips. This is what he read—

‘I don't know why you keep out of my way. If you knew how a word from you helps me to go on, you would never treat me so. I have walked past your door often, but can't find you. I should come, but you said you should be angry. Do meet me somewhere, or I don't know what I'll do. Send a word to

‘GLEN.’

His eyes glistened as they rested upon the paper, and he kept them fixed there

with a peculiarly triumphant expression. Even his intelligence had not been able to resist the inevitable impression, but nothing before had impelled him to the absolute conviction that this girl *loved* him. At this moment it swept through him like the wind through an Æolian lyre, raising tones of wild but exquisite sweetness, vague, harmonious, if lacking in definite expression.

Never had he known a moment's tenderness towards the little butterfly. Augusta alone had awakened him to that sense, and towards Augusta alone had he ever felt it. His present sensation was more subtle than that. Certainly the figure of Glen now rose before him with some alluring, overpowering force, and he dwelt eagerly upon it. In this light he

could perceive wholly new aspects in her past attitude towards him, and instead of ferociously resenting the perception, he harboured it and sought inspiring sparks in it. He advanced from point to point in the pursuit, till his whole frame quivered with excitement. Nay, there was unaccustomed ratiocination in him. 'Try the stones for a change,' Cuthbert had bidden him; had he not tried them and found them miserably to fail? There was yet another source,—one which Mr. Smart would certainly not have recommended,—but one which nevertheless might have in it unutterable secrets for Shiel. He had been aroused from his sentimental insensibility; in its partial repudiation, (Augusta stimulating) something had been learned—in its uttermost destruction, might

not all the rest be found? Instantly he sought the paper, and somewhat tremulously he scribbled:

‘MY DEAR GLEN,

‘How should I know that I grieved you? You have taught me not to do it again. I will see you with pleasure. Meet me in the morning at ten, at Clarence Gate.

‘Yours,

‘S.’

An impetuosity still marked his movements as he thrust this into an envelope, and licked and banged the gum. That unnatural grin, too, was on his features, destroying the long-suffering gaze which had recently been in them, as also that less determinable quality which had ap-

peared 'nobility' to Handsel. Here now was little but animal vehemence, curbed perhaps by the heartless leaven of human sarcasm. But there was at least no hesitation about him. He went forth with deliberate step, and posted his letter in the pillar at the corner.

Although the morning broke with fog and wretchedness, to one heart in the town there was brilliant sunshine. Glen had been lying awake during the early hours in feverish reveries; the heavy breathing of her companion by her side, and the loud ticking of their nickel American clock, the only accompaniments to her thoughts. At length there were movements amongst the other inmates of the house, and a passing candle-light appeared through the chinks of the doorway.

If it were possible, Glen's heart beat faster. Her letter to Shiel had been a desperate ultimatum, and it did not seem possible to her that it should go utterly unheeded. Inordinately shrewd in all things of personal import to herself, there could be no doubt that Shiel's attitude had received at her hands a pretty accurate construction. The radical change in him was, of course, obvious to all; but all had not the same cause for its elaborate interpretation. At a loud knock on the street door Glen leapt from her bed.

The raw morning air swept into the house and up the staircase as Glen thrust her head from her bed-room doorway. She heard the door below slammed, and her heart thundered in her breast.

'Anything for me, Sarah?' she shouted.

‘ Yes, miss, one.’

‘ Bring it here, will you ?’

The girl ran up the stairs, and Glen disappeared into her chamber. Her drowsy companion grumbled on partially awakening, but upon receiving no answer, again composed herself to sleep. When Glen had placed the candlestick on a chair by her side, she crept shivering into bed, and drew the clothes around her, hugging the letter madly into the warm. Now that she held it, the uncertainty of its contents thrilled her. What might it not contain ? Her fancy scribbled endless extravagant epistles, couched in words of the most passionate ardour. The long hidden confession might at this moment lie here on her breast,—nay, something, she knew not what, absolutely convinced her that

it did. It was this that gave the uncertainty its glamour. It was rare for other than sanguine expectation to assail Glen.

When she could tantalize herself no longer, she stretched out her arms and put a light to the candle, for the morning gloom did not seem light sufficient. Then she turned and re-turned the envelope, holding it between her eye and the light, as though thus to decipher the coveted message within. With a half childish petulance she at last exclaimed, 'It is very thin,' and then impatiently tore open the paper.

At first the contents were a bitter disappointment to her, so glowing and ample had Glen's anticipation of them been. They savoured so much of that frigid formality which in his behaviour had before

caused her so grievous irritation. All enthusiasm faded from her eye. She recalled the words of her appeal, meant to be irresistibly pathetic, and railed at herself for not having said more, for not having put it beyond all possibility of misconstruction.

But, even in Glen, reason gradually dawned, and she began to read more in the words than she had expected. In the face of all he had ever said to her, surely they were a significant advance. Once apprized of this, she sat up to read them yet again, and more and more seemed to gather around them. So rapid and so progressive was the perception, that Glen at length burst irresistibly into song. Then her companion turned and grumbled again at the disturbance.

‘Why can’t you sleep?’ she muttered.
‘What’s the time?’

Glen only answered by turning and embracing her, an action which met with but indifferent reception. But at length the girl was sufficiently aroused to gather the cause of her friend’s elation, and to bring to it the fuller measure of her more extensive experience of life. Shiel’s words were read out to her at full, and the two reposed there to discuss them according to their light.

Under such guidance, Glen advanced rapidly in enthusiasm, so that by the time they had had breakfast and she was about to depart, a wild anticipation possessed her soul. Golden pathways opened out before her through the fog, beginning at

the somewhat prosaic portal of Clarence Gate, but stretching far away into the dizziest empyrean conceivable to the sentimental mind. What was it that she slipped in her impetuosity on the slimy pavement; that eyes and throat smarted from the poisonous irritant she was breathing? She only recovered her feet, gathered her furs about her, and laughed at the insignificant assailants. Never had she known how genuinely she loved him. He re-appeared in the condescending cavalier glory when he had seized her upon Magdalen Bridge,—a point to which she never failed to look at moments of exceptional emotion, as the first from which her life had started, and none other than *he* was the magician by whose touch the trans-

formation had been achieved. 'Of late he had been—but she would not contemplate of late. All was to come.

In this emotional ferment did Glen approach the entrance to the park which Shiel had appointed. The ironwork of the gateway already loomed indistinctly through the fog. A cab was standing by it, and an omnibus came thundering down the road adjoining. She ran over the crossing with her eyes of purpose to the ground, and only upon reaching the opposite pavement did she glance about her. The silent waste of grey infinitude which enshrouded the park seemed to end the world in that direction, too wide a prospect for Glen's regarding. Limits were essential to her. She knew that she was early, so she complacently appropriated

some half-dozen paving-stones and persistently traversed them. The traffic here was but fitful, and the only regular accompaniment to her fervid imaginings was the drip-dripping of the condensed vapour on to the already sodden ground, of suggestion not in itself exhilarating, but of no avail against Glen. Church clocks struck ten, and as the girl counted the bell strokes she found her agitation increase. One tower was considerably behind the rest, and told his tale more deliberately; and when this had ceased Glen peered about with a suspicion of impatience. She crossed over in front of the gateway, rounded this corner and that, had to re-swallow her heart at every individual footfall; but the familiar figure was not yet to be seen. A hoax was—but no, not

from him. All her frame reiterated the vehement negative. To and fro she paced.

Presently she became conscious that there was a want of geniality in the atmosphere, that her feet were growing cold. A clock actually tinkled the quarter, and Glen felt a shivering current down her back. She then found it necessary to enlarge her range, and she chose the inner pavement before the terrace which loomed upon her left. She walked more quickly, to that far corner and back. The prospect remained a blank. She set forth with accession of pique this time, but looking back as long as the gate was at all to be discerned. When it had wholly faded in the gloom, she still walked onwards. Yes, *he* should have to wait. She went on and on until she reached yet another gateway ;

but then she turned and ran all the way back to the point from which she had started. Surely a figure appeared there as she approached. How her heart scampered! But it was too tall,—bah, one of those detestable keepers of the gate! Tinkle, tinkle went that clock: three-quarters-of-an-hour. Oh, the sickening dread! But—was this Clarence Gate at all? Had not her impetuosity confused her? That man was retreating on his way, but the girl was instantly beside him.

‘This is—isn’t Clarence Gate, is it?’ she gasped.

The man surveyed her with official interest. Oh, the wide world for a good plump negative!

‘Yes, miss, this is Clarence Gate. Do you want——’

He watched her dart again into the obscurity, and went smiling on his way.

As the clocks once more struck the hour, Glen departed, cold and wretched as the atmosphere around her. In blind misery she came almost to her own door, when suddenly an angry ray illumined her, and she turned again away. She had the paper on which Handsel had written his address in her pocket, otherwise in her confusion she could never have recalled the street. Swiftly she set off for Hampstead Road. Perturbed as she was, the locality that he had chosen amazed her. On a day like this it appeared in all its native squalor, surrounded by the ignoble attributes of subsidiary commerce. Her hand trembled as she took the knocker,

but her heart was defiant enough. A little girl answered it.

‘ Mr. Wanless lives here ?’

The child stared at her visitor, as she answered,

‘ He left last night.’

‘ What do you mean—left ?’

‘ Gone for good.’

‘ What’s his address ?’

‘ He didn’t tell us. He said he was going by train.’

Glen stood stupefied.

‘ Is that all, miss ?’

‘ I don’t believe——’

But she checked the petulant outburst, and hurried away to hide her tears. Her experiences that morning had already sufficiently unnerved her, so that under

this she completely broke down. After hiding her distress for some time in the unfrequented byways, she gathered enough courage to hurry towards her home. That unfailing companion would be able to assist her, for her own brain was numb and useless.

‘He has gone, Nan,’ exclaimed Glen, with tragic impetuosity, as she burst into her friend’s presence.

‘Then, Glen, you are done,’ was the philosophical comment. ‘Properly sold, that’s all.’

‘You—he——’ but the girl collapsed in a chair in a fit of hysterical weeping.

When the main outburst was over, the other took it upon herself to console.

‘You are not the first that has been let in, old girl ; but it was neatly done.’

‘I—I shall find him.’

‘I should advise you not.’

‘You have—have never cared for anybody. You don’t know what it—it is.’

‘Pretty well. But you will perhaps believe me now, that you can’t work it from one side.’

‘It wasn’t from one side. He—he loved me; I know he did. I’ll find him wherever he is. It’s something else.’

‘Some *one* else, of course. They have managed it well. They’re in Jericho by this time.’

‘Who?’ flared Glen, looking out through her tear-bound lashes.

‘I should think you know best. I told you—Sunday morning in the Park. No wonder she gave you his address.’

The consoler laughed heartlessly.

‘ Perhaps now you’ll take my advice.’

But Glen leapt from her chair.

‘ She !’ she shrieked.

‘ Don’t get too excited, or you’ll——’

The remainder of the reflection was lost upon the one for whom it was intended, as the door had slammed, and Glen was no longer in the room.

Yes, Handsel was at home, and ready to receive her visitor’s confidence, interjectional though it was. When she understood the whole of its bearing, no doubt she was surprised, but she was able to give the matter a very complacent regard. The reaction in Glen incident to the demolition of her shrewd adviser’s theory, wrought a stupefied submission in her, and, whether or no she heard all the benevolence of her

cousin, she at least received it in silence.

Handsel examined the note which Shiel had written, and turned it over thoughtfully in her fingers as she addressed its recipient. In the midst of her harangue Glen got up.

‘But where has he gone, Handsel?’

‘Of that I know no more than you.’

‘You swear?’ cried Glen, fixing her glistening eyes upon her companion.

‘I swear, and will do anything more if necessary to convince you.’

‘I’ll believe you, Handsel, before any of them,’ said the other, with a rebound of hysterical emotion, throwing herself into her cousin’s arms, despite the consuming hatred of which she had been conscious a short time before. ‘Good-bye.’

‘What are you going to do?’

‘Nothing. What can I do?’

Glen was not in a mood to be artful, although her action pointed so suspiciously to the contrary. She was no sooner on the pavement outside than a ray of inspiration illumined her. ‘What can I do?’ had been quivering through her whole system, and the flash came by way of response to this. He had gone by train, late, for he had received and answered her letter. She hailed a cab and was soon at King’s Cross station. Glancing once or twice into the booking-office, she scrutinized the clerks there. One was near the third-class window, young and spruce-looking. No passengers were approaching, so she darted to the place. Probably her face, still bearing traces of

emotion, offered a peculiarly fascinating appearance as it peered through the aperture, for it was obvious that the gentleman inside leaned forward with a ready urbanity.

‘Do you know what tickets were given for the last train to the north last night?’

What with the tremulous timidity of the questioner and the unusual nature of the inquiry the clerk had to ask for it again, leaning far on his elbows to give the full power of his intellect to its consideration. Glen repeated her question in a slightly altered form, but only got a pleasant shake of the head in return.

‘But there would not be many going so far as Northumberland, would there?’

The man gave a ticket to a gentleman requiring it, then returned again to the

more interesting investigation. He talked benevolently for some seconds, explaining his difficulties.

‘But, one minute,’ he added at length, seeing the appeal of Glen’s countenance. Turning, he called another gentleman to him, who spoke brusquely until he too glanced through the aperture. ‘Oh, ah, what? Smith, wasn’t it? I say, Smith, here a minute.’ Smith also joined the unofficial conclave.

‘Several for Newcastle. Can’t possibly remember . . . This lady . . . Oh, let me see. For what place, madam?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Glen.

‘There was one for Morpeth, at any rate; and what’s that other place?—h’m, I forget—both ladies.’

‘It was a gentleman,’ interposed Glen.

‘Yes, there was a gentleman came in a hurry, late—where on earth—oh, that new bit, to Wooler he booked. I really can’t remember any more.’

‘Thank you very much,’ she said, for some passengers were waiting.

Wooler—in a hurry and late—she would try it.

When Glen reached home her friend was out, so she got all her own money, several pounds, and scribbled a note to explain that she should be away for a day or two. Then she went out again.

CHAPTER II.

SUN AND MIST.

DESPITE a broken summer and the early rains, the heather had lost little of its vitality to the eyes of one fresh from the severest bonds of a sordid incarceration. If the sun were mellowing it could still irradiate an unbounded pavement of living colour, the supple buoyancy of which was emphasized by the vigorous breezes keeping in constant play the subtle shade of every sprig and flower. Shiel first beheld it with a sense of ecstatic bewilderment,

so startling was the contrast to that overweighted world from which he had so impetuously fled. Clouds of body and soul seemed at the instant to have been rolled back, and he caught a glimpse of a universe which had never been presented to him before.

Idealism he had undoubtedly perceived in that brief visit to Mr. Smart's rectory, of a peculiarly ethereal and transcendental kind too, but between that and his present novel experience there was very little in common. If such a solid attribute were for one moment applicable to a disposition so irregular, so volatile, so irredeemably vagabond as Shiel's, then was there definite religion in that former ardent impulse; a reverberating echo of that old determinate dogma which had eruptive power

in him still, albeit screened in the darkest recesses of his being. His idealism now was of the poetical pantheistic imagination only, bred of an unconscious worship of the sun alone, as the obvious source of all material and spiritual life.

Until but a few months ago, all his life through had he gloried in the moorland freedom, but, as he now perceived, in an instinctive animal way, more for the savage repudiation of human bonds which it suggested than for the direct imaginative exaltation which lurked in its sparkling depths. The first day after his arrival he flung himself in this abandoned mood upon the expansive inspiring bosom, and imbibed therefrom unrestrainedly the invigorating regenerating draught which for so long had been proffered to him in vain.

For thirty miles did he roam over breezy heath-clad summits, through silent grassy defiles ; joining the hoarse laughter of the grouse, the whistle of the lingering curlew, and the placid meditations of the heron as he had never joined in them before. Scarcely a tree, only two or three human habitations did he encounter, and of human beings none. Of this, even yet, he was glad. The success seemed intoxicating, supreme.

From this solitary escapade did he recover much of the radiant comeliness of physique which had characterised his pugnacious undergraduate days, a fact proclaiming his apparent deterioration as mainly a matter of the nerves. His face but reflected the subtler revolutions within. Some load seemed to have fallen from him,

some part of himself to have been dismissed. For these two or three first days he had literally the faculty of disowning the past. It did not appertain to him; it had never been. All life was this unsuspected ecstatic present, and he would drink it to the lees,—if it were possible that such could lurk beneath a beverage so translucent.

It chanced that the days were fine, and, although he did not immediately repeat the initial extravagant exertion, he passed hours on the silent moors. Some distance behind the little border-town was a rugged and imposing pass hemmed in by precipitous steeps and only leagues of heath around. This Shiel immediately appropriated for his own, and to it he began regularly to repair. It was a romantic

scene on its own small scale. Sheep and goats picked their perilous way amidst the grey crags above, and a foaming broken burn tumbled along the bottom. On a rock by its side Shiel would sit, hearing nothing but the plunging linn, and admitting no thought from beyond the precincts of the savage spot; nay, ignorant of the existence of any such beyond, and ignorant even that these sparkling hours must end.

On the afternoon of his third day he was seated here in mood accordant; the sun still high enough to clear the hill above, and so bathing him in this secluded windless hollow in a warm and golden light. The water was still brown from the recent rain, but clear and sparkling as wine, and the rock at his feet was studded with

cushions of brilliant moss which the spray bespangled. Clumps of heather in bloom, of fern, and of grass nibbled to velvet, softened the frown of the grey old face above him, whose every wrinkle was betrayed by the stare of the merciless sun. What were Shiel's own thoughts at the moment, no doubt he could not have formulated ; some placid impersonal reverie through which the soul was bereft of its humanity and became but a passive attribute of the natural spirits around. He had watched a bit of eddying foam drawn onwards and dispersed ; a trout that flitted to a stone ; then a dipper in impetuous flight and with whistle of alarm that came flying over the linn to alight upon a stone not far from where he sat. He saw it all with that instinctive effortless eye natural

to the born spirit of the wilds. But when he moved his face he was visibly startled to confront the fixed gaze of other human eyes in close proximity to himself.

So sudden was the apparition, so reactionary, so incongruous, that immediate realization was impossible. For several seconds were the two pairs of eyes fixed in immovable scrutiny upon each other before there was any effort to break the silence. Then Shiel, without the slightest relaxation of features, muttered 'Glen.'

'Yes, Mr. Shiel, you are not afraid of me.' She looked down and smiled.

The dipper flew onwards again with a whistle, and Shiel's mystical reverie was broken; finally, irreparably shattered. One deep, it might have been, agonising breath recalled him to the world of man.

Moving a little so as to face her more easily, he demanded, in a commonplace tone, an explanation of her astonishing movements. Truthfully and without restraint she resolved the puzzle, Shiel hearing it all in silence with his eyes upon the moss.

‘Did I really write that to you?’ he asked, as soon as she had finished.

‘Here it is.’

He took his own paper from her fingers, and cast his eye upon it. A shudder passed through him as he recalled the words, every tremor of the mood in which they had been scribbled clearly visible upon them, and the mood itself recoverable by aid of the association.

‘You are sorry that you wrote them. They are sham—you didn’t mean it.’

‘I meant it and more, at the moment.’

Glen looked down and coloured, her heart in wildest palpitation.

‘I knew that, or I should never have been impudent enough to come. I am not all the worst you think me.’

‘You must know what everybody else will think you.’

‘I don’t care for anybody else,’ she asserted, warmly. ‘They can’t think me worse than they do already.’

Shiel again removed his eyes from her, if he might still the throbbing of his brain—readjust himself to that thread of reason which he had lost. Presumably he failed, for he turned to Glen abruptly and seized her hands. No word was spoken, but he fixed his eyes in wild devouring scrutiny upon her face, taking in every dainty that

was there presented ; and undoubtedly the girl was very fair. The golden hair peeped from above her forehead,—the white smooth brow itself placid as a cloudless morning,—the glistening eyes with wide twin pupils like the blue of twilight hills,—the sunset cheeks,—the chin and throat—all were consumed by that fiery gaze, whilst Shiel held back his breath. He had never seen a woman before—no, not one—not one.

But she felt his hands tightening,—the grip becoming painful ; though she never winced or moved a muscle.

‘How dare you follow me?’ he asked, fiercely, the flash from his eyes thrilling her to the ear-tips. ‘How dare you fling yourself into the clutches of a desperate man? You know nothing of me ; *you*

cannot know the frenzy of an inhuman soul!’

‘I am not afraid,’ said Glen, her tongue not gainsaying her bravery, and her ruby lips finding fullest play in utterance.

‘Not afraid,’ he retorted, moving his grip to the blue-veined wrists and blanching them. ‘What can I not do to you?’

‘I am not afraid.’

Shiel was known in muscularity, and now his strength was multiplied incalculably. He had drawn her from her seat, and with one hand round her wrist, and the other to support her, he held her extended over the linn like you might have done an infant, shaking her the while. True to her assertion, Glen did not blench, there was no trace of alteration in her colour. She lay calmly in his

clutches, as though upon the easiest of couches above the firmest earth, and smiled placidly.

‘ Could I not fling you down and shatter your little life in an instant ? ’

‘ Do it,’ she said. ‘ I should have seen you last. Life is not so much to me.’

She looked at him as she spoke, and he, giving one last deep gaze into her comely features, drew her back into safety, and buried her in a passionate embrace, so long and ardent, as though he strove thereby to absorb her fragile life completely in his own.

Whilst this cosmic turbulence was proceeding in the bottom of the defile, the same tranquil conditions possessed all the natural surroundings. The sun had dipped a little, so that the stream and the human

figures were now in the shade, and the golden light had commenced its ascent of the steep slope of loose grey stones which rose above them. The wind skipped over the top of the valley, just ruffling some braken and a thorn bush near the summit, and carrying some bird's note across the moorland. A sheep appeared upon the rim, its fleece golden in the sun against that profundity of blue, and it gazed downwards; but no other eye beheld the marvels below. Glen lay in those powerful arms, in her wild momentary content, returning his rapturous scrutiny with the whole of her radiant features, all crimson in their joy. The face of Shiel was transfigured, the mad demoniac defiance being merged in a flame of overwhelming tenderness, which bathed and screened its object in

a flood of brilliant warmth. He had flung her hat away, and one hand supported her head beneath, buried in the glistening heap of loosened hair, whilst the other made a fondling frame for the divinely tinted forehead. There was artistic as well as mere passionate rapture in Shiel's ardent gaze, for he would now draw back his head in gentle pose, tracing with minuteness every inspiring detail, then lessening the space, he would select a spot upon which to lower his tremulously parted lips in silent transport. Birds peeped now and then, and flew onwards. The sheep had gone.

The sun was still mellowing towards the west when they, that had come out alone, recrossed the moor in company. A whole world was altered in the brief space which

had intervened, another whole one had been evolved from the restless eternal forces. Endless revolution, and man must be content.

But slight pause was made in the little town, and in the evening light Shiel and his companion withdrew to a still more secluded centre. Not far away, and on the moorlands still, for this unbounded wild expanse formed an essential part of their newly-created entity.

For the day or two that followed a delirious spirit was abroad; flitting over the spacious solitudes sacred to the sheep and silent moorfowl, and sweeping the waning heath with a gust which outstript the most impetuous breath of the skies; it invaded the rocky fastnesses, startling even the raven and the buzzard in the

savage seclusion to which they were bound; it lurked in mossy caves, abandoned to mountain spirits less unruly than itself. *They* were restrained by the bonds of times and seasons, but *this* defied the very universe itself. It arrogated an elemental supremacy unto its tempestuous wings, and would gladly dash itself heedless against the sun.

Perhaps, in a moment of expended fury, it would pause and regard its strength in the eyes of its unchartered brethren. Here on this rocky slope, smitten of the noonday rays, and screened from the subtle breaths, an expanse of barren waste before stretching away to an imperceptible horizon, vague and limitless as its own, would this spirit attempt congenial speech:

‘ Oh, the sordid, grovelling soul of man !

Content to bind itself for an eternity to the foul limits of a despicable moment! No wonder that the world seems hell. The world for man does not exist. He has refused it; flung off the illimitable glories of a universe that was his own, for the reeking confines of a filthy kennel. He that may ride that space there, a companion of the stars; gird himself with that belt of cloudlets which is circling the whole earth; to whom even the wind is not a measurement, the very zenith not a curb,—he will wilfully root out his wings, bind up his eyeballs, and say, “Now I have found it. Victory is mine!” A worthy summit. Let us aim beyond.’

Or, in a calmer mood, in the face of an evening sky, the clear amber horizon merging upwards in a deepening violet

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— !

flush, with one purple cloud for emphasis

‘ Oh, the depth and glory of it ! The very limits of the universe are only glimpses of further, ampler heights. This hush clothes one with infinity, the only garment for a living soul. To this can the spirit be in tune . . . Just look into that unfathomable sea ! There can——’

‘ It is very pretty,’ in a timid, mundane voice, could instantly check the intensest utterance, so that these transcendent flights were generally broken and concluded in as intense a silence ; but for the soul itself they continued omnipotent.

But alas, the spirit is weighted with a mortal flesh, ignore or repudiate it as we may, and the latter seems ever on the alert to waylay its airier rival. In the face, for instance, of a grey infinitude from the

north-east, the two are apt to become ignominiously interdependent. One morning, Shiel looking out for that inspiring glimpse which had hitherto been so marvellously interwoven with his regenerate mood, found his world a blank. Strain as he would, and he did gather his eyeballs into an aching scrutiny, his horizon was limited strictly to the garden gate. He spoke it not, nay, he did not confess it to himself, but from that moment his soul was garmented with other than infinity. He strove to be buoyant, to companion the stars in their glorious altitudes, but the chilling cloud had reached his heart.

During the morning hours, the raw mist which had enveloped the whole earth was gradually dispersed, and the sun came out again, inviting that imperilled spirit to

one further flight over its native wilds. It could convince itself that its wing was unimpaired, that it could still cleave the dizziest infinities with unfailing power; but it was noticeable, nevertheless, that it engaged itself actually more with the less exalted limits. Although the sun shone, it had but a hazy lustre, and the zenith through which it travelled was of a watery hue, whilst earthly horizons did not exist. On no hand was the suggestion of that translucent infinite supremely complete, and it might have appeared to the viler vision that infinity, if not translucent, was somewhat deficient in the subtler forces.

At a favourite rock Shiel paused, to let his companion rest, she who laid no special claim to the immense, whether translucent or other. Her eyes seemed to find the

prospect limited enough, nay, positively blank and unutterably dreary, if their silent expression were fully to be trusted. A timid glance at Shiel's face, if he chanced to be engaged with the horizon, would diversify her features, but the effect was fleeting, and the former apathy would quickly regain its paramount position. Upon one such occasion, Shiel's eyes being fixed with more than ordinary intensity at a point no further removed than a stone at his own feet, he seemed to invite a more protracted scrutiny, and accordingly Glen's gaze had rested upon him. It was long since he had spoken, and she never fully understood silence.

In examining his face so intently, originally anxious perhaps to extract therefrom some confirmation of a definite precon-

ception of her own, she permitted her mind to wander into all sorts of irrelevant courses, more or less attractive to herself, and so to forget altogether the direction in which her eyes were turned. Thus it came that Shiel, abruptly turning, encountered an expression of countenance for which his meditations had wholly unprepared him, and which accordingly required a second or two for its proper elucidation.

‘What on earth are you thinking about, Glen?’ he asked at length, perhaps a suspicion of very worldly impatience tinging the utterance. The girl coloured and lowered her eyes; but, raising them again to pass it off with a smile, she said—

‘To be quite true, I was wondering when you would return to London.’

From a gaze his eyes turned into a stare.

‘To London? . . . Never.’

His brows had gathered, and he spoke with a curtness which she had quite forgotten.

‘Oh, I hope you will.’

‘Do you mean that you want to return there?’

‘Not yet, of course, but some time. Do—do you think of living here?’

What a question to put to him! Could he by any possibility have thought of such a matter in that coarse, blunt way? Shiel knew not as yet of any local habitation. In that, at least, his vision was still supreme. He had been standing some three or four yards away from her, but now he came and sat on the rock beside her.

‘Do you find you have made a mistake?’ he asked, in an impulsive manner, looking into her face.

‘I, Shiel? Never——’

‘But I shall never live in a town again.’

‘I don’t mind.’

His eyes remained upon her, but with a strange expression of uncertainty within them. She touched his hand, as though for reassurance, but he quickly withdrew it and got up.

‘You are quite cold,’ he said, abruptly.

‘We had better walk on.’

Their rock was on a slope fronting the west, with a wide expanse of heather before it dipping to a crease, and height after height beyond. Their walk lay eastward, skirting the top of a fir plantation, and they had a little ridge to mount before

any prospect opened before them. To the top of this they walked in silence, and then, instead of the spacious, undulating scene which had been expected, appeared an advancing sheet of impenetrable grey, striding ruthlessly over the ruddy hills, obscuring yard by yard, welding earth and sky into one wet, blank mass.

‘Oh, horrid!’ muttered Glen, her teeth chattering as she spoke.

She was sunnily, airily dressed, with no additional means of protection—shelter at least two miles ahead.

‘We must go back to the rock,’ said Shiel, decidedly. ‘This would wet you to the skin.’

Without dissent or acquiescence, simply in a dumb, spiritless submission, Glen turned with him, and with hasty strides

they waded through the heather, pursued by that chilling, eastern cloud.

Their former resting-place afforded partial shelter since it had its back to the east, and as the top of the rock, only a dozen feet high, stretched forward a little. Glen crept into such security as was presented, and Shiel took his place silently beside her. As soon as they had done so, the drizzling mist came tumbling down the slope, extinguishing everything in its stealthy course, and searching out the most hidden crannies for its minute globules of hoary vapour. So long as the smallest prospect was visible before them, Shiel stared doggedly in front; but when all was finally closed he rested his face upon one hand and looked as doggedly to the ground. Perhaps he saw the moisture

gathering like a silvery bloom about his garments, and moralized upon it ; perhaps his mind was wholly in other scenes. There was nothing whereby this could be determined. Glen shivered constantly, and her fair complexion had lost the delicate gradation of tints which was its peculiar charm. Without speaking she crept closer and closer to her companion, but he seemed heedless of her condition. At length she ventured to take his arm, but still he made no movement. By this the mist had reached her eyes, and then she said, tremulously—

‘ Hold me, Shiel.’

Thereupon he looked at her abruptly.

‘ Are you cold ?’ he asked.

‘ Perished,’ she said, in accents as misty as her eyes.

In a determined and matter-of-fact manner he took her on his knee, and sheltered her in his arms, but they hung loosely about her, she gathered little warmth from the contact. Her teeth still were chattering. Another sound, too, now arose from this waste of silent grey, a light, monotonous rattle or whisper, and Shiel, looking up, saw that it was rain.

‘Then we must go, Glen,’ he said, arousing her. ‘It will not clear now.’

‘In this?’ cried she, clutching him impulsively. ‘Over all that horrid moor!’

He only said, ‘We must go,’ and placed her down.

On looking forth, the unfavourable conditions became more fully visible, and even Shiel paused to ponder. He cast his eye over her flimsy garments, then

without a moment's hesitation divested himself of his own jacket and made her put it on. His white shirt-sleeves looked no more than paper, and the rain was steady. Glen laughed at first at the oddness of their appearance, but it was a flicker of a moment.

'You can't go like that,' she said, more resolutely.

'Come,' said he.

'No, Shiel, I will not move. Do you think I will be the death of you? It will clear soon.'

Shiel knew his moorlands better.

'It will not clear before night. I will carry you until we reach the track. Come.'

He went forward to raise her in his arms, but she only flung her own round his neck, and held him. As he was lifting her she

fiercely released herself, and refused to go.

‘Have you any string?’ she asked.

He frowned a negative; and Glen without another word leaned to the lower hem of her petticoat, and after an initial effort a shrill swish was audible, and she rose with a long swathe of calico in her fingers. Shiel simply eyed her with mute bewilderment. She demanded his knife, which was passively handed to her. With it Glen crawled to a sheltered recess by the base of the rock under which they were standing, and feeling some heather which grew there, she cut it in handfuls. First of all she made him stand upright before her, which he did with unquestioning submissiveness, and then laying the heather upon him, she bound it like a pad round his back. More calico was

required and supplied, and his chest was similarly treated. But his arms he withdrew, not permitting them to be bandaged. Then with one ring of irresistible laughter, Glen said that she was ready to go.

There was no risibility in Shiel, all his faculties being limited to the prospect around. The rain still steadily descended, in that measured regularity of output which argues abundance of resources in reserve. Everything around was long since drenched, shining patches on the rock beginning to trickle down the surface and drop into the sandy soil beneath. For some distance the saturated heather was knee deep. Shiel took up his companion in his arms, where she reclined complacently enough, having with noticeable precision so arranged her skirts and her

position as wholly to cover his shirt-sleeves, and thus they encountered the clouds, for three quarters of an hour pitilessly assailed by their irresistible forces.

Despite the precautions which they had been able to improvise, the two were as literally saturated as the heather through which they had waded. Through the whole of the journey Shiel had scarce spoken, answering only in monosyllables such commonplaces as had been put to him. These had soon ceased ; for, in addition to the obvious tenor of the responses, Glen had had super-abundant opportunity for the study of his equally expressive features ; thus, no doubt, it came that in addition to her tongue, her eyes also became sealed. Whilst he carried her, it might have been thought she slept,—

Shiel himself so construed it and bore her farther than was needed. When they were in adequate shelter, and had effected such restorative measures as were possible, the atmosphere was not greatly cleared. Glen's eyes still rested timidly upon those enigmatic features, whenever she ventured to glance at them, and it was plain that no inspiration was the result. But the girl was pre-eminently human, and human capacity of the more normal kind has definite limits; Glen at length found hers, and seeing that inspiration came not from without, she fell back upon her own resources. Shiel was apparently engaged with a book, one of the cottage collection, but Glen refused to believe that he could read it.

‘Perhaps you find that you have

made a mistake, Shiel,' she hazarded, in such an abrupt and impetuous manner as to disclose all the nervous preliminary effort.

Shiel looked up and met her eyes.

'Rather more than a mistake,' he replied, with singular deliberation.

'How—what do you mean?' gasped Glen, straightening herself in her chair, for he seemed perfectly serious.

'What can I mean? Look in your own mind for the explanation.'

'But you have always said that everybody was free,—that you detested the—the ways of other people.'

He only replied with a long look into her face.

'You have said that every woman ought to be independent, and do——' His eye

checked her. 'I can show it you,' she declared in vehement self-defence.

As he rose to stare out of the window his face betrayed vituperative anger, but he did not speak.

'Every word that you have——'

'Don't speak to me about it,' he exclaimed, under the unbearable irritation. 'You can't understand a single syllable I have ever uttered.'

'I am sure I can; but why have you made more than a mistake?' cried Glen, growing resentful in her turn. 'Don't you care for me after all?'

'Perhaps not,' returned Shiel, with recovered composure. 'But that has nothing to do with what I said. The more I cared for you the greater might be the mistake.'

Glen's mind was not of a ratiocinative order, hence the wider aspect of Shiel's attitude, now or ever, were wholly lost on her. At this present moment nothing but that nonchalant negative possessed her, thrilled her little system to the point of irrepressible exasperation. Her own unmistakable, if blind passion for the man who had uttered it set a train to her merely inflammatory vanity, and she quivered with her complex emotion.

‘You don’t!’ she cried, starting up from her chair, all her face flushed with colour. ‘Have I done all this to be laughed at—to be hated! you think no more of me than that!’

‘We need not argue about it.’

‘We need——’

But in the vehemence of Glen’s at-

tempted utterance, something seemed to catch her in the throat, and as her voice sank into an indistinguishable whine she burst into a fit of coughing.

Shiel watched her not unkindly, indeed at last he walked forward as if to caress or assist her, but she pushed him away. Even Glen was a woman, and outraged vanity was not to be condoned in a moment. Shiel readily turned and the moment had sped.

‘Then we had better separate—at—at once—I suppose,’ she cried in little better than a croak.

‘Certainly,’ said Shiel, with that exasperating imperturbability.

And overcome by her passionate tears Glen fled from the room.

Pique in such as Glen has to take the

place of more determinate resolution. Of course she had not believed a word of what Shiel had spoken, nor fully meant any one of her own, at least in a mood of sanity she would not; but the sole antidote of pique is humiliation, of course in the causer of the irritation. After some moments' passionate abandonment, Glen's instinct could enlighten her so far and her little frame quivered with the demand for retaliation. She had gone so far as to seek him; nothing could be more effective than that he in his turn should find out her.

In the afternoon the woman came in to tell Shiel that Glen had gone, and that same evening he also took his departure.

CHAPTER III.

THE SHADES.

‘ You think I am mad, Handsel, or worse, wholly without what worldly people call honour,’ said the Rev. James Gilholme to his sister as they sat in ardent converse in the latter’s room in Bloomsbury. ‘ But do you think that such trivial considerations can have any weight with me? I do not affect to hide that my own passion holds a foremost place in what you call this wretched infatuation, but with what object do you suppose that passion is im-

planted in us ? It may be an elevating, purifying fire as well as when misused it may become the consuming torture of Tophet.'

'But, my dear brother, the world has to be lived in. Some eye to the gross and practical considerations of our temporal state must be accorded. Surely you will admit this.'

'God knows we give them eye enough,' sighed the minister, 'and I of all folks should be the last to assume any position of exceptional unworldliness; but in this point I am right, my lass, and nothing will induce me to falter.'

'I would not say that the poor little thing is a wholly abandoned girl, although many might; but from the life she has chosen can you suppose that there is the

smallest particle of mense in a' her construction? Or anything whatever that can enable her to be a fit wife to any man, to say nothing of an earnest minister of the kirk?'

'A' that is beside the mark, my dear Handsel. The less she has, the more call is there for her rescue and guidance. Can you have a doubt but that the Almighty has placed this vehement passion in my breast solely for the deliverance of our wandering little Glen? solely that she may have a harbour of refuge here and a brighter record at the last?'

There was an impassioned dignity in the young minister, which, despite her worldliness, Handsel could not but perceive with a lurking admiration and respect. She listened now in silence.

‘If it were not so, what guidance have we left?’ he continued, with fervour, looking to the floor. ‘The deeper that she sinks the stronger becomes my responsibility, and I am resolved that in this matter I will do what I cannot but perceive to be right though all the rest of the world should oppose it. What can we possibly weigh against a human soul, Handsel?’

‘Nothing, certainly, if you take the matter in this way.’

‘I do, and must so take it. The attitude of the world has no place with me. Is not marriage instituted of God for the welfare of individual souls, and not surely for the convenience of domestic trifles, or the paltry requirements of a minister’s parish? If Glen do not make a good

wife, as they all would say, in these particulars, God helping me, the loss shall not be known, certainly not to the parish and least of all to myself. Oh, I have searched and pondered this matter more than I can tell you, my lass, and every day it becomes clearer to me, more irresistible.'

'But if she persistently refuses? If she marries another?'

'That, of course, is in God's hands. I only do what each day sets forth. Have you no clue at all as to her whereabouts?'

'None whatever; but there is no reason to suppose that she will be absent long.'

Doubtless Handsel spoke truth enough. Seeing her complete ignorance of the progress of events, what possible assistance could have been rendered by a revelation

of the further impediment arising from Glen's unaccountable infatuation for Mr. Wanless, more particularly in the face of Shiel's well-known antagonism to the indelicate behaviour? Handsel decided none, and did not mention it.

James had just arrived in London, as a practical response to a very innocent remark in a letter from his sister in reference to Glen's movements; Handsel being bound by a solemn promise to render all possible account of her cousin's doings, since none was ever forthcoming from Glen herself. Why the young minister should so instinctively have suspected critical predicaments in connection with a day or two's absence from town on the part of a musical artiste of pronounced independence, must be relegated to the

mysteries of the spirit which are at length receiving scientific investigation proportionate to their merits, and upon which nobody may lightly speak. In the face of the minor reticence which Handsel felt it prudent to sustain, her brother's action had caused her infinite astonishment, and even she awaited the issue with a degree of curiosity to which she was far from accustomed. She readily conducted James to the house where Glen had been living, in pursuit of additional light, but the companion with whom no doubt wider information lay was not communicative, and could only display the note which she herself had found on the table awaiting her when she returned after Glen's enigmatical departure. Thus much accomplished, Mr. Gilhome decided to linger

here a week, if perchance his soul might find quiet from some source or other in the meantime. Handsel found distinct pleasure in displaying such resorts of historical importance as could by any possibility appeal to her brother's particular order of mind, for in truth she was beginning to find her existence in the town uncomfortably solitary. She had made no single acquaintance, with the exception of Miss Lavington, and although that young lady had for a week or two after her departure manifested an epistolary interest in her odd friend's occupations, presumably her professional duties, and the variety of engagements which they inevitably entailed, extinguished her always limited leisure, for the correspondence had not been sustained. Handsel nevertheless re-

ligiously subscribed to the *Herald*, and thought that she could now and then identify a column which might have issued from the pen of a fair observer in St. Petersburg.

James evinced a far from contemptible range in the display of his interests, and in spite of the disquieting causes which had prompted his journey, his mind acquired a distinct increase of elasticity by his visit. One morning, the second or third of his being there, Handsel received an urgent note from her friend Ebba at the vicarage, which enjoined an immediate visit to a book-dealer mentioned, and an inspection of certain volumes detailed over leaf,—‘if condition blameless, buy them at once. I enclose postal-orders.’ This, of course, was of frequent occurrence, and

Handsel had long since proved her efficiency in such commissions. But the interest of this particular occasion lay in the presence of James. He accompanied his sister to the shop in question, and whilst she was busy, he naturally conducted a little investigation on his own account. The result as much shocked his pious instincts as gratified his slender pocket. Theological classics actually floundering in a 'fourpenny' box. He had then heard truly of London. 'In Edinburgh, Handsel,' he said, with the true bibliocosmic zest notwithstanding, 'it would have been eighteenpence or two shillings at least.' Thereafter James displayed a positive avidity for fourpenny boxes, and dingy booksellers' shops in general. It pleased Handsel if it could afford diversion to him, and for a day

or two they almost forgot the disquieting topic.

On the last evening that James was to spend there, he and Handsel sat over their fire, engaged in placid conversation about something they had witnessed in the daytime, and which had apparently appealed to them equally, for the talk was evenly balanced. It had turned wet, cold, and wretched out of doors, and the minister's mind was resignedly prepared for the inevitable return to his pastoral labours, (at that moment, as it chanced, of peculiar importance,) an ardent devotion to which he alone found able to sustain him through this period of sentimental disquietude. It was possible that the impregnable position which his conscientious meditations had at length urged him definitely to occupy had

been able to extort a certain amount of submission even from the more sophisticated Handsel, and she had but during this very evening again solemnly undertaken the task of investigation and supervision which his irresistible earnestness thrust upon her. The trivial extent to which such, under the most favourable circumstances, could reach, she did not for a moment conceal, but within such limits her efforts should not be spared.

This matter had for some time been disposed of, and the two, I have said, sat in tranquil conversation. Except for such erratic visits as Glen found it necessary to pay to Handsel, the latter day by day and week by week knew not the interruption of visitors. Such remarkable predicament was no doubt noted of others whom it did

not concern in the household amongst which the girl resided, but such being other than an adverse quality in tenant it passed unresented. It was therefore with an inevitable tremor that Handsel, during this unruffled discourse with her brother, received the announcement that there was somebody to see her. For no obvious reason the thought of Shiel instinctively occurred to her, and for reason no less obscure her unemotional features distinctly coloured at the thought of her brother being witness to the unlooked-for visit. But all this was only for an instant, as a sensation of a wholly different order was immediately aroused by the startling entrance of Glen. James leapt from his chair.

‘Oh, is it you, miss?’ exclaimed Handsel,

easily, to counteract the shock and inevitable restraint. 'You don't look much better for your visit to the country.'

Glen was unusually pale, and as she tried to speak her voice was low and hoarse.

'No, I've caught a bad cold,' was at last made intelligible to the hearers.

'Then why do you come out on such a night?' retorted Handsel, sternly.

'I wanted to see you. I didn't know that you had anybody with you,—they never told me.'

'You don't count me anybody, Glen, I hope,' interposed James, with a tremulous attempt at pleasantry. 'Come to the fire.'

Nobody made an attempt at more formal greeting, and Glen came forward to the

chair which Handsel vacated for her.

‘ You know that you have no business to get a cold like this,’ continued Handsel, no doubt finding the tone of chiding the most convenient cloak for surprise, anxiety, and the sundry other uneasy constituents of her momentary emotion. ‘ You’ll go on until you have it once too often; and if you haven’t sense to be aware of your own danger, you might at least think something of the feelings of other people. Take them all off,—you won’t leave this room again to-night, I can assure you.’

Glen had merely taken off her gloves, and unbuttoned the waterproof she was wearing.

‘ It will be better not,’ muttered James, his eyes flitting nervously from one to the other of the faces before him.

‘Oh, Handsel, I must,’ croaked Glen, plaintively.

Her cousin only replied by removing the superfluous garments, and again planting her visitor in the chair before the fire. Then Handsel knelt down, and with her own hands removed the wet and muddy boots, replacing them by a pair of her own slippers, a sight of the proportions of which upon her own tiny feet raised an irrepressible smile on Glen’s pallid features. James caught it instantly, and developed it into an audible, if not too obviously spontaneous, ejaculation of laughter.

In Glen’s uncomfortable predicament, the slight measure of resistance which her instinct had inevitably prompted was rapidly extinguished before the subtle perception of tender authority in Handsel. The sense

of wretchedness and desolation induced in Glen by her illness, only too readily reclined upon the finer groundwork of superior power, when such arrogated unto itself the whole duty of mental and physical effort. With a shawl over her shoulders, her feet warm upon the fender, and the domestic atmosphere which the familiar features of Handsel inevitably imparted playing around her, Glen began to recover her faculties, and with them inevitable access of uneasiness in the consciousness of James's presence. But both he and Handsel, (initial difficulties so effectually surmounted,) deliberately set themselves to contribute as much to her spiritual ease as they had already done to her material comfort. They seldom directly addressed her, but by conversation

amongst themselves they contrived to acquaint her with the circumstances to which she had entered. One piece of information which James could not resist communicating to her direct, was a recent 'call' from a congregation of his order somewhere amongst the hills, whereby he was on the point of acquiring a pastorate, residence, and some substantial income of his own. Glen expressed her satisfaction, but betrayed no secret enthusiasm at the accomplishment. It was in the course of this important disclosure that ruminations of Handsel's seemed to arrive at a certain maturity evidenced in the first place by a question abruptly put to her visitor.

'Do you really think your friend will be alarmed?'

Glen had pleaded this at the outset.

‘I didn’t leave word where I was going ; she was out.’

‘Then I will go and tell her. I can take the ’bus, and shan’t be long.’

Unexpectedly Glen raised strenuous opposition,—a more marked display of vigour than at any previous moment had escaped her. It was not necessary ; her friend wouldn’t trouble herself about her. Handsel mustn’t, shouldn’t go out in the rain for such— But Handsel must and did. She dressed to go, and for upwards of half an hour she was away.

Although James had offered no word of opposition to Handsel’s too transparent artifice, when the full benefit of the device was put into his hands his nervous uneasiness and indecision seemed to deprecate the advantage. His disclosure of the

manifest attractions of his recent preference, in which Handsel's impulsive decision had so prematurely disturbed him, assumed a fragmentary ejaculatory aspect, which unfortunately Glen herself was in no position to regulate. She simply gave a negative or affirmative as the particular occasion seemed to require, leaving rather more than mere initiative to him.

‘It is a pleasant place—not so wild and lonely as some of them—and such a nice little manse, Glen; the garden behind reaches down to the burn, and by it there is a summer-house . . . I shall have two hundred pounds a-year. It is a great sum, isn't it? To think that I have been so blessed. Sometimes I cannot believe it . . . But the work is the chief part, and I hope I feel it to be the best. What a

lifetime may be opening out for me !
Oughtn't I to be happy ?'

Glen added to her mere head movement,
'I hope you are.'

'I am, intensely. In fact, after to-night I shall go back to it all with a vigour which I have never before known. You are not very ill, Glen ?'

She coloured again at the ardent gaze which he permitted to rest upon her. She briskly repudiated the suggestion, despite the voice with which she was constrained to emphasize her protest. Nothing but a very bad cold. Her throat was a little sore, but no,—she had no kind of pain in the chest or anywhere. James rubbed his hands, as much with satisfaction at the unexpected complaisance of her attitude as at the actual information conveyed.

‘Oh, you will soon be all right; but, although Handsel is rather rough, she is right, you know. You really ought to be more careful.’

‘Yes,’ croaked Glen.

‘You know that there are some that care for you, don’t you?’ She nodded this time, and looked into the fire.

‘You didn’t answer my letter, Glen,’ hinted James, moving to touch a piece of coal with the poker.

‘I had nothing to say.’

‘No, of course not; of course not. Never mind. I ought to have known that. But you will some time, won’t you? When you are quite well? Anything, you know. It is all interesting to me up there.’

‘But you don’t like anything I have to say,’ stammered Glen.

‘Oh, I do, if it is about yourself. Yes, anything: your singing or anything you do. If it is about yourself it will please me—more than please me.’

Glen nodded again, and there was a brief silence. James knew that each moment might possibly be the last, for it seemed to him a long time since Handsel had left them. But he was divinely happy. Just to be thus alone with her in mock domestic familiarity, to look upon her face, even to hear that poor struggling voice, was quite sufficient for his present simple needs. Impulse had on a previous occasion frustrated all; he would be more wary now. That she had promised to write to him,—was not that an unprecedented concession in itself? Had the manse told? Although the young

minister was harmlessness itself, there was in this thing undoubtedly just the essential spice of the serpent.

Handsel came in rosy and radiant. Her brother's face was greeting sufficient, and taking her cue from it she permitted herself to relax astonishingly. Thus the remainder of the evening speeded to its end.

The following morning James departed for the north, lighter at heart perhaps than ever in his life previously.

'She has promised to write to me, Handsel,' were his last words at the station, although the fact had been fully exhausted previously. 'God bless us all.'

That Glen was, for some inscrutable reason, inordinately amenable, Handsel continued to find. She remained in her cousin's hands contentedly for the few

days that followed, in no way ill enough to be kept in bed, but passing through the ordinary stages of a very severe cold, and betraying throughout the same subdued condition of spirits manifested at the outset.

Perhaps the girl's abnormal submissive-ness was sufficiently explained by the fact that for the first time in her life she was experiencing the symptoms of a conscious reflection. Her recent escapade had marked the crisis of her existence hitherto, and it had not been encountered without an effect which was considerable. Glen clung to certain instinctive theories, the property of her race, and it was by reason of these theories that her present demeanour was sustained. She was simply enjoying a temporary rest upon the force of her

supremacy. Every tradition went to support the unassailability of her position, and she only awaited the assured prize of her self-command. It was for him now to come and sue.

Day by day through her long periods of silence was Glen revolving this thing. She had put the farthest limit at a week; if within that time he did not come in with unconditional surrender, she would—well, she would see. More determinate resolve seemed at the moment hardly needful. The fire of his love for her had exceeded the very wildest of her hopes; more, how inexpressibly more, than she would have ever needed for such unquestioning confidence. But she was getting stronger, her cold was all but gone, with the exception of a little cough which usually assailed

her after any attack of the kind, and with vitality reviving her irritability increased. Handsel took this as the surest sign of the security of her health, just as the meekness had been the chiefest source of her anxiety.

It was the very day which completed the week, and the one upon which Glen had resolved to demand her discharge, that a letter arrived. Glen at once saw that it was in the writing of the friend with whom she lived, and her heart leapt. Surely the victory had come. She withdrew herself to the window to tear it open, and so hide her face lest perchance it might reveal too much. But with abruptness she turned away, and confronted Handsel.

‘I have to go and see about an engage-

ment,' she said, in that old familiar tone.

'Bless the lass, do you think you can sing with that cough?'

'Pooh, it's nothing now. At any rate, I shall go and see.'

'Why begin again?' said Handsel. But Glen deigned no reply. That day she went.

Handsel's expectations proved correct. When she went to pass her trial, Glen met with undisguised derision for her pains. She found that she could not sing at all.

This was an unexpected blow to her, as her stock of money was now far from considerable.

'How long was it, Nan, when you had that cold?' she asked her familiar, with plaintive vehemence.

‘About a week.’

Glen had ample funds for that time, so she acquiesced with what grace she could muster. But as day followed day this proved to be not the only source of her disquietude. No letter or any other sort of communication came for her, and she grew angry over this in secret. Nothing but anger was able yet to assail her, for in the light of those vivid reminiscences her position was too irresistibly convincing. She began to meditate revenges. Hopelessly confused as were Glen’s moral perceptions, it is but justice to her to mention that nothing but supremest marriage had she ever contemplated in connection with Shiel Wanless. Such modicum of soul as had been imparted to her was, every tremor of it, devoted exclusively to this.

It had become a very religion to her,—or madness. But the little creature in her ethical shipwreck was bereft of a rudder ; and even a compass may be useless without one. The week went by.

Her friend tried her voice, and augured badly of it.

‘ It is my belief, old girl, that you’re done. At any rate, I should see about it.’

Glen stared at her aghast.

‘ Do you mean to say that I shall never be able to sing again ?’

‘ Very likely. Such things do happen.’

But Glen reviled such a theory in passion. She knew the current name of a throat doctor, talked of amongst her class, and when she was alone she resolved privately to prove the absurdity of the

suggestion. She had to pawn some article of value to make up a fee, and with the proceeds she went. She returned in bewildered weeping. The absurd suggestion was irrevocably affirmed. Her singing was at an end, and no letter was arriving.

For a day or two poor Glen abandoned herself to hysterical prostration, but by medical aid she was aroused. She then looked upon a world with which she was not familiar, a world in which her little irritabilities were not supreme. Her life hitherto had been a marvel of smoothness. She had simply done what she liked. That was the only law which she could conceive. To be told that there was altogether some different rule in the universe was novel, to say the least. It was this which Glen was

now setting herself to construe, and the task was difficult.

In the abandonment of surprise, she confided to her friend all the complexities which clustered around Shiel, and to that young lady's credit it must be recorded that she did not laugh. She felt genuine commiseration for her ingenuous distresses as well as for those of a more practical nature; but she had not before known that the little girl was a fool.

'You are waiting for him to come?' she cried, in her extremity of amazement.

'Of course I am,' retorted Glen. 'You don't know anything about him.'

'Oh, I thought he was a man.'

'What if he is?'

'You have seen the last of him. Do you mean to say——'

‘ I know that he is dying to come back.’

‘ It is more than likely.’

‘ He isn’t like the men you know.’

‘ Well, I wouldn’t let him make a fool of me, at any rate.’

Whatever Glen affected at the time, she generally found herself at last irresistibly entangled in her friend’s experienced conclusions, and even upon this occasion there was to be no violation of the rule. Under a certain aspect she could discover something in the other’s constitution, and it proved to be something the reverse of balm. What if he was but a man and wanted only to make— But then her little frame quivered with anger,—yes, anger against him. In such a constitution, the strength of passion may easily become but the measure of resentment. As she had

loved him, so also could she fancy she hated; until at length hate him she would. What a triumph of revenge! Even in this would vanity be appeased, for did she ever doubt that he loved her? But she had one relapse. Secretly she stole away to all Shiel's former haunts, and lingered about them. At length she summoned courage even to inquire at the doors, but he had not been there, nothing was known of him. Then she once more invoked every unamiable passion that was in her,—all, all clamoured for his uttermost humiliation. By way of victory, of course, alone, and with no remotest thought of any self-annihilation.

Angry, penniless, and her vocation gone, she came as ever to Handsel and was yet again received. That pugnacity sustained

her she did not disguise, and in this fact was no doubt to be found the surest testimony to the strength of her convictions and her vanity alike. In one so indifferently stayed, the loss of confidence in self must inevitably have involved some very obvious, even tragical collapse; but from this Glen seemed as yet very far removed.

Handsel betrayed no alteration either in general demeanour or in her personal attitude to this particular young woman, (who had now definitely constituted herself as her destitute pensioner,) and yet, during the three weeks that had elapsed since Glen had been under her protection before, even the placidly constituted Handsel had taken a minor part in certain significant experiences. Had Glen been in any condition more nearly approaching her

normal aggression, it might have occurred to her as a subject for legitimate suspicion that her cousin was unaccountably reticent upon a topic in which previously she had seemed only too ready to interfere. It was certainly odd that, although they were day after day together, no reference was ever made to Mr. Shiel Wanless. Not in the most indirect manner did his name ever come up for discussion. As it chanced to suit Glen's own predicament too exactly, the matter passed unobserved. But Handsel had certain dates and incidents in her possession, and it was quite possible that she could concatenate accordingly. None of her meditations, however, were disclosed.

One day, after her establishment there, Handsel said,

‘ I am writing to James to-day : have you anything to send ? ’

At first the suggestion was received with a stolid indifference, but, as though inspired by a sudden ray, Glen at length jumped up.

‘ Yes, I will send a note . . . I promised to write. ’

She forthwith took a pen and wrote, as he had wished,—about herself.

CHAPTER IV.

SAMARITANS.

ONE morning after the arrival of the letters Ebba, with an opened newspaper in her hand, descended the vicarage staircase, and went directly to the library door. Since she had made the vital discovery in that chamber, she had never assailed her father in his stronghold, but to-day she knocked loudly and fearlessly.

‘Well, Abb,’ came in the familiar accents, but uttered, Ebba thought, in a

subdued tone, with a view possibly to minimize the sepulchral effect.

‘May I speak to you, father, for a minute?’

‘I will be with you directly.’

The fiction of reticence was still inviolably sustained, although even Mr. Wanless could scarcely deceive himself longer, if indeed therein he had ever had any success. What must have added materially to the difficulty, was an experience which the clergyman had had some weeks previously to the time we now have arrived at. It happened on a day when Mr. Wanless had been to a church at some distance, to conduct some special service for a professional brother who had importunately requested it, and, contrary to his daughter's expectation, her father had

returned in a mood of extraordinary placidity. As he had walked with her in the garden in the course of the particular afternoon, he had actually indulged in some very imaginative reflections of a more or less pious tendency upon topics which his morning's thoughts had no doubt primarily suggested. That her father could be imaginative, Ebba knew full well, but it was rare for him to display his accomplishments in familiar converse with her alone. He touched upon the effect of the love of nature upon the cultivated human soul, and emphasized the necessity of the infant imagination being nurtured very largely upon it.

‘If effectually assimilated at that impressionable period,’ he remarked, ‘it gives an ineradicable imaginative, (religious you

know I call it,) groundwork, which I do not think any materialism of later life can successfully assail. Let the scientific assaults be what they may, there is a basis of poetry ever ready to receive and parry them, a definite spiritual stimulus which in our present intellectual predicament is invaluable, to the race alike with the individual. Should it appear even extinguished for a time, it will reassert itself to the leavening of the whole system.'

Much more to a like effect did Mr. Wanless impart upon that occasion, all of which remained in his daughter's mind, for the day was chronicled as one of exceptional pleasantness in a tale of no extravagant exhilaration. Indeed, 'their time had been passed together until the

evening; but, when they returned from evening service, they had separated to their individual chambers. For some reason that night Ebba heard the sound of the library door with unusual perturbation, pausing indeed on the mat at her own doorway to hear it more attentively. Then she had gone in, and had seated herself deliberately to call up the scene that was being enacted below. No doubt in some particulars she erred.

As a matter of fact, the vicar had entered his dismantled sanctum with a feeling very similar to that wherein he always entered it, despite the unusual relaxation of the earlier hours. A candlestick was in his hand, and this he first placed upon his table in the centre of the room. He then stepped to relock the door by which

he had come in, the key moving with inaudible smoothness.

A reading-lamp was on the table, but the clergyman seemed to prefer the less glaring light of the candle. He seated himself in his chair, and, with one hand upon his forehead, he raised his eyes stealthily to the rows of hollow shelves which opposed him, and which only dimly appeared in the indifferent light with which he contented himself. Then he got up, and paced sundry times the length of the carpet. Again he paused, and, taking the candle up from the table, he raised it aloft above his head, as though to display more effectually and convincingly the stark nakedness of the land. Of a sudden he lowered the light, and it trembled in his clutch. The other hand

he pressed again to his brow, as if in the attempt to still some throbbing, then he drew it down over his eyes. But once more his gaze was fixed upon that particular portion of the bookshelves, this time in unmistakable affright. The expression was, however, but momentary, and muttering, 'Really,' in a determined way, he walked forward to the wall. Then again he stood, with the candle uplifted.

'Surely not mad,' said he, more audibly than before. 'Nay, let us see.'

Therewith he stretched one hand boldly forward, and snatched a volume, which, spectre or solid, occupied a place with many others beside it, where to the man's particular knowledge had that morning been vacancy. He went with it to the table and sat down, for his agitated con-

dition rendered this support essential. He handled the book absently, letting his fingers wander expressively over the sides of it, as though itself a sentient creation, and capable of appreciating his touch. Then his eyes were lowered to the lettering on the back. He read the words there and his brow lightened. With a distinct parting of the lips he opened it at the title page. 'Yes,' he nodded, 'the second, the very edition, the only reasonable one. Binding somewhat different.' Then with more impetuous step he returned to the book-shelf. Volume after volume he pulled down, growing positively excited in the process, and at every title page that he inspected, 'The very edition,' would he exclaim; '*the* one.' At last he counted the array—eighty-nine in all. Again with-

drawing to his chair, he sat there, and, unemotional block as all could with safety have proclaimed him, the Reverend Edgar Robertson Wanless wept.

The maid brought Ebba word that her father would not partake of supper, so that the young lady had hers brought up to her alone. The clergyman's step was heard ascending at the usual time, he appeared to give his daughter the accustomed kiss and good-night, and then as usual withdrew. When he had gone, the girl laughed exultantly. Even she had not been able to expect it.

Since that day many additional volumes had appeared and been discovered, (there were now some two-hundred-and-fifty of the more readily obtainable works replaced there,) but no reference to the mysterious

circumstance had yet been attempted in the household. Ebba continued her labours undisturbed, and Mr. Wanless prosecuted his in precisely the same manner as formerly, whilst domestic routine was sustained in every familiar detail.

On this particular morning, the clergyman responded to his daughter's call with noticeable alacrity, for she was scarcely again in her room before his step was behind her.

‘ You want me, Abb ?’

‘ Handsel has sent me this paper—will you read that ?’

It was evidently a London morning-paper, and Ebba's finger indicated one of the minor paragraphs at the bottom of a page. This is what Mr. Wanless read—

‘EXCITING SCENE IN HAMPSTEAD ROAD.—Late yesterday afternoon considerable excitement prevailed in Hampstead Road owing to the erratic movements of a man supposed to be a lunatic at large. After being followed for some time by an increasing crowd, he was rescued by the police and taken to the station. Upon medical examination he proved to be suffering from some form of delirious fever, and was conveyed to the nearest hospital. Although a man apparently of respectability, nothing could be learned of him beyond the name Wanless found on papers in his possession.’

The clergyman’s lip moved nervously as he looked at his daughter; then he exclaimed, with a vehemence not common in him,

‘What is the boy doing?’

Ebba explained how many weeks it was since she had heard from him. In a state of agitation, the vicar had passed to the window.

‘You must, of course, go up instantly, Abb.’

‘I was about to suggest it.’

‘Nay, I will go with you,’ continued the clergyman, the same unfamiliar impetuosity of utterance marking his speech. ‘It is now eleven-thirty,’—his watch was in his hand—‘Beattie must get us there for the quarter past one. Jane!’ Mr. Wanless had now transferred himself to the landing outside, and was vociferating his orders to the kitchen below. Thinking her master at last in the long-expected outburst of mental aberration, the girl gladly speeded for the vehicle required, and talked significantly here and there as soon as her message had been delivered. ‘Get a bag ready for me instantly,’ was the final instruction to his daughter, and for the time

intervening the clergyman sustained his agitation as best he might.

It chanced that Handsel was not the only reader of the paper that day in whom the insignificant paragraph mentioned could arouse a sense of interest or even alarm. Wanless is not exactly a common patronymic, and anybody numbering that particular cognomen amongst the tale of his acquaintance, could reasonably be struck by that sensational reference to it in the newspaper. Such had been the case with Mr. Cuthbert Smart, as he glanced over the journal in the elegance of his mother's residence at Craven Hill, and with characteristic promptitude, in any case where a particular friend's welfare was at stake, he had within half-an-hour

thereafter been seated in a hansom cab which was rattling him over the stones in the direction of the — Hospital. At the doorway of that beneficent institution he drew up, and he had soon obtained from some responsible officer of the establishment evidence sufficient to assure him that the unfortunate casual was none other than his lost friend Shiel. A momentous consultation had thereupon followed, but whether the patient (who was pronounced at that moment to be still delirious, and in a critical condition) was to benefit materially by his transference from the gratuitous to the paying list, it would be ungracious to speculate. The arrangement at least did not fail to give Cuthbert some measure of definite satisfaction, and, having purchased that, he was quite con-

tent to be once more driven on his way.

Handsel had discovered the notice in the paper but the day after Glen's wilful departure from her, to renew, as that young lady thought, her former career of amusement and independence ; for the brief interval, of course, which was to elapse before the manifestation of her ultimate triumph. It was perhaps therefore inevitable that, in the observer's mind, these things should appear something more than a mere coincidence. Glen had disclosed to her cousin both the fact of Shiel's unaccountable disappearance and her own extraordinary solicitude for his rapid discovery. Her own disappearance had immediately succeeded, and now the re-emergence of them both under circumstances more or less peculiar, had come

by way of irresistible confirmation. It was not likely that prurient curiosity, or even moral apprehension alone, would have much power against Handsel, but that the tendency of things was of some definite concern to her she had unhesitatingly to admit. She herself had taken the precaution of identifying the homeless casual, Wanless, arriving at the hospital some hours after Smart's visit there, and she had thereupon posted the newspaper which had aroused such unusual emotion at the Linnbrig vicarage.

Late as it was upon the arrival of Ebba and her father in town, their first concern was naturally to satisfy themselves as to Shiel's physical condition and the material provision made for the patient, before withdrawing to their hotel for the night. Upon

the former point their information was far from reassuring, so grave indeed being the outlook that Ebba expressed her immediate determination to take up her quarters at the hospital for the night. But from this, by a permitted glimpse of her brother and the representations of the doctor, she was ultimately dissuaded.

Neither father nor daughter found it possible to talk much for the rest of the time that they had to pass together that night. Their only words which were of the slightest significance were exchanged as they threaded the streets in the gas-light, and were upon a point which had inevitably aroused reflection in both of them. To find Shiel in such sumptuous accommodation had at once relieved both of a horrible fear which, to their domestic

intelligence, had been one of the harshest elements of the situation. To temperaments of such tender sensibilities, the normal contemplation of their own affections in the ward of a public hospital is, in the quality of it, but narrowly removed from the same unfamiliar juxtaposition with regard to a workhouse or a gaol. Whence the agency through which they had been spared this bitter aggravation of their woe even the authorities had not been able to inform them. The munificent gentleman had declined to give his name, and, since his bank-notes were of quality undoubted, it could not be imputed to his discredit.

‘Have you any idea, Abb, as to who Shiel’s patron may be?’ Mr. Wanless had asked, as they were walking.

‘Yes, father ; it is Mr. Smart.’

‘Oh!’

Her father did not seek for Ebba’s private source of information, and, as it chanced, he did not then look at his daughter’s face. For a piece of purely instinctive conjecture, she had certainly assumed a singularly confident position. However, it satisfied them both.

For two or three days Ebba haunted the hospital corridors, until at length the dizzying news came forth that the patient had slept. It was not until then that the sister’s emotion reached its critical point, and her momentary collapse betrayed through what she had passed. Directly she had regained enough of her customary self-control, she rose impetuously to rush forth. Then her father’s anxiety equalled, nay, how unutterably exceeded her own.

She was perfectly aware, and it was intolerable to her that he should be subjected to such excruciating penalty for an additional instant. Her eyelids were still red, and indeed her sight was dim from an excessive rebound of the nervous forces. But what did she care? Should she be ashamed of tears,—nay, who in the midst of such pre-occupied millions would so much as give eye to her or her tears? Hurrying, in this abandoned mood, from the spacious portal, of a sudden she stopped. For the first time in the whole course of her maidenly existence Ebba felt confused, showed it, and alas, knew that it was plain. But the effect surprised her. Mr. Smart stood back aghast.

‘He has slept and will now get well.’

For an instant Cuthbert had misread

her tear-stained features, and the complex shock had staggered him, self-sustaining as he usually was. But Mr. Smart was rapidly recalled. He turned and accompanied Ebba silently down the steps. Both aware of the momentary constraint set themselves immediately to remove it.

‘I hoped you had not heard about it,’ began Cuthbert, rather impetuously for him. ‘It would have been far better if we could have got it all over and then sent you a clean bill.’

‘But I am glad we did. My father has come up with me—a significant concession.’

‘Ha, no doubt. But you have suffered horribly, needlessly.’

Ebba’s eyes were still burning Cuthbert’s brain, although since the initial

encounter he had not dared to glance at them.

‘I think it does one good,’ returned she.
‘Part of one’s apprenticeship.’

‘I am less philosophical,’ said he, and glanced.

Ebba had herself now in supreme command, and she looked up fearlessly.

‘But some reference to your action, Mr. Smart, is necessary. That has spared us all needless suffering.’

‘I wish I could believe it,’ laughed Cuthbert.

‘Conventional thanks are paltry in such an instance.’

‘They are, Miss Wanless, and I am obliged to you for sparing me them. You know this momentary interview is more to me than abundant thanks. Or don’t you?’

The dry expression and the accompanying look aroused some colour in Ebba, but she quickly passed it off.

‘I accept your kind assurance. May I go further, and ask how far you go back in this deplorable experience?’

‘As far as yourself, I suspect: the paragraph in the papers. It is long since Shiel gave me the slip. Poor fellow, he would have done better with the rectory after all.’

‘No, no, Mr. Smart; *now*, I certainly don’t think so. I fear there was no such short cut for him.’

‘You think not? What a disastrous business it is to have a temperament!’

Ebba acquiesced laughing, and they came to the steps where she had to turn in.

‘ You will see my father?’

There was a very pretty shade of diffidence in Ebba’s tone and manner, which sent a thrill through Cuthbert.

‘ I should like to,’ said he, ‘ but—after you have given your bulletin. I will go into the coffee-room.’

Their eyes met, and both were aware of the mutual intelligence. Ebba ran off with riotous music in her heart, and such light in her eyes as but seldom appeared there.

The clergyman was found in a quasi-public room upstairs. He looked quickly at his daughter, and read immediately the message of her face. Advancing hurriedly towards her, about to speak, his tongue misgave him, and he turned abruptly away.

‘Yes, father, it is all right,’ said Ebba.

The room chancing to be empty she plunged into an impetuous narrative of her medical report. It was some time before Mr. Wanless spoke.

‘No suggestion of an interview?’ were his first words.

‘Perhaps to-morrow.’

‘H’m . . . After it, Abb, I shall leave. You had better stay a little longer,—just to see him convalescent—and—and to bring him home.’

The clergyman’s eyes were upon his daughter, but she betrayed no sort of movement.

‘Yes, father,’ was all her response.

‘And now, Nabbs, I want to go to the Abbey.’

‘By all means—but, oh, I forgot to say

that Mr. Smart is here. I met him on the way, and he came in to have a word or two with you.'

'Certainly, to see such a man can be nothing but a pleasure under any circumstances. Is he downstairs? I will fetch him up;' and Mr. Wanless stepped off with unaccustomed alacrity.

The two gentlemen re-entered the room talking amicably.

'Good news, Mr. Smart;' and a significant hand-shake had been the clergyman's only acknowledgment of Cuthbert's Samaritan action. Evidently they understood each other.

The visitor did not linger for many minutes. He had expressed his surprise at and deprecation of the vicar's speedy departure.

‘ I have no passion for the town.’

‘ But, Mr. Wanless, you positively must give us a day or two.’

Cuthbert’s persuasion could only elicit a respectful refusal. The clergyman should certainly pay his respects to Mrs. Smart that very afternoon, but pastoral affairs positively necessitated his earliest possible return to the hills. With this Cuthbert was obliged to be content, and he went not wholly dissatisfied.

Ebba and her father, being country-folk of more or less intelligence, of course elected to walk to Westminster. The mere streets were suggestive spectacle to them, and afforded scope, upon one side at least, for vivacious intercourse. Ebba found much of the reserve which her father inevitably inspired in her wholly

dispelled under these novel conditions, and she revealed her own thoughts freely. By a considerate afterthought of the clergyman's they were to call for Handsel, one brief interview of Ebba's being hitherto the extent of their communion with her. She was found, and the three trudged over the pavements in company.

Of the solitary Handsel's reflections during these critical days nobody knew. To herself they were but a vague indeterminate trouble, brooding quietly over her unemotional nature like autumn clouds over her own placid moorlands. She never examined it, never asked its definite direction or its source. She knew now that the presence and conversation of Ebba immediately dispelled it, but whether solely on account of the report that

the latter had to give she did not inquire.

Just as through the boisterous streets Ebba had found her impulsive inspiration and her speech, so now in the solemn quietude of the hoary aisles, and amidst the crumbling relics of a vigorous poetic past, was the intellect of her silent father to find its fullest, most congenial, expression. In his youth an unfolding world had for an instant been vividly revealed to him, and his soul had quivered for the strenuous enterprise displayed there; but the vision had long since faded, at least as anything beyond the merest external spectacle. He had never lost an instinctive curiosity in watching the development and progress from which he was himself excluded, but for any part in the actual throes he had

come to acquiesce in his constitutional unfitness.

The two girls listened with respectful interest to Mr. Wanless's audible reveries. To Ebba they were delightful upon more than one account, for reasons personal as much as intellectual : to Handsel they simply gave embodiment to crude instinctive perceptions rooted in the centre of her being, but to which she would never have attempted to give expression.

The clergyman simply abandoned himself to the imaginative flight of the traditional, the historical spirit ; the soul which clings to the indissolubility of the past. The fervour and clearness of it was but the impetus from the unbetrayed emotions through which he had so recently

been passing. It was his method of delivering his soul, and, more than possibly, of emphasizing his own recaptured tolerance of a sentient human world.

‘The links of continuity, Ebba,’ he would say, impressively, ‘require constant contemplation. They are the only solid hold for the intellectual side of our imagination and the surest incentive to any rational progressive development. It is a glorious coil in which must surely rest our pride equally with our strength. The repudiation of it is to me the most amazing as well as the most tragical aspect of your present time.’

It was not until Ebba and her father had to go to Craven Hill that Handsel left them.

CHAPTER V.

GOSSAMER.

MR. WANLESS was urged so far as gentle manners would permit, but without noticeable effect. The good man clung with exemplary pertinacity to the spiritual requirements of his parish, and from such secure anchorage was not easily to be stirred.

‘Then Miss Wanless at least will take pity on us,’ said Miss Cicely, in winning tones. ‘Not even the Sunday School

shall intrude any prior claims upon her for the present. Shall it, mother ?'

' I hope not,' said the elder lady, looking graciously at Ebba.

It chanced that Cuthbert was not at home.

' As a matter of fact,' observed the clergyman, with unusual dryness, ' my daughter has latterly declined to officiate at the Sunday School.'

' Oh, shocking !' laughed Cicely.

' But she gives us more than compensation in other, what some might call but not myself, more secular directions.'

' And is entitled to a holiday, I'm sure. Just a week, Miss Wanless ?'

' How much notice did you give me, father ?' said Ebba, with what seemed gaiety in her.

‘ Nearly half an hour, I think.’

‘ I left upon *nearly* half an hour’s notice, Mrs. Smart, and for what purpose, you know’

But the plea was taken up with jocular-ity and not admitted, and thus it came that Ebba was decoyed into her first domiciliary visit to a west-end residence of unimpeachable respectability. She was to come upon the departure of her father from London, and the two visitors for the time returned to their more humble locality, in a condition, nevertheless,—yes, each one of them—in a condition of unconfessed exhilaration.

‘ A very refined and genial household, Abb,’ was all the clergyman’s comment.

‘ You think so, father?’

‘ Yes, I do.’

It was found necessary that two more days should intervene before Ebba was permitted the long desired interview with her brother, but nothing was said by Mr. Wanless as to that protracted interruption to his pastoral duties. He had told his daughter that he himself intended to speak with Shiel before he could possibly return to Linnbrig, an announcement which the young lady received with characteristic complacency. The time was spent in comparative recreation, the only events natural to one of the clergyman's predilections which were systematically avoided, being the British Museum and anything bearing the remotest resemblance to a bookshop. It would have been ludicrous enough to Ebba had there not been another somewhat graver aspect to it, to observe the amazing

pertinacity and skill with which the mildly biblomaniac vicar could sustain a more than unlettered obliviousness of the very existense of such emporia. If their peregrinations brought them unexpectedly upon a detached establishment of this description, however insignificant its proportions, the daughter entered readily into the exclusive attractions, architecture or other, which the opposite side of the thoroughfare invariably presented. But now and then Ebba's whole frame gave an involuntary quiver at the ironical experience. Equally with their action, their conversation tacitly acquiesced in the imperative restriction, and no manner of book, recent or established, supplied a theme during the whole course of their joint sojourn.

But the morning came when Shiel was

to feel the pressure of his sister's hand, and it was highly characteristic that even then they did not offer to exchange a kiss. The invalid's appearance of course gave Ebba an excruciating shock, but to command that now was a small matter with her. She, for the ten minutes allotted, resolved to confine herself to topics of general interest, but Shiel himself displayed not the slightest reticence in regard to his own illness.

‘I got some sort of chill, Abb,’ he said, by way of concise explanation. ‘I didn’t think that I was such a chicken. Is the heather over yet?’

‘It is getting brown.’

‘And the curlews flitted, I suppose?’

‘Mostly, but we heard one as we drove by Loanend.’

‘Loanend . . .’ mused Shiel. ‘They

always liked that marshy meadow there. Singular how these things *will* cling to one. They have bothered me unspeakably all the time And a diabolical grouse.'

Ebba joined in the smile.

'Is Pettipher slaughtering this year?'

'He has had a large party there, but I should think they will have gone by now. I left the moors silent in our direction.'

'Until the winds arise. I should like to hear them whistling round Tam Tallon's Crag.'

'Hardly just yet, I should think,' laughed Ebba.

'Why not? Oh, I forgot Is father quite well?'

'Perfectly. Would you like to see him?' Shiel fixed his eyes (to his haggard features now a solemn centre) upon Ebba's

face, and they rested there silently for a few seconds.

‘How do you mean?’ he asked at length.

‘He is here with me, if you would like to have a word or two with him. He will go back very soon.’

‘Do you mean to say you have actually persuaded him up here?’ He dropped his eyes, smiling.

‘Actually.’

‘Certainly, I should very much like to see him.’

One of Ebba’s primary objects being so satisfactorily attained, the interview was hastened to a conclusion.

During the afternoon of the same day Mr. Wanless came, and he and Shiel greeted with as little effusion and ceremony

as had been between brother and sister, but with no less. Rather oddly, before the clergyman was thoroughly established in his chair, his son assailed him with a philosophic reflection.

‘Just before you came in,’ he said, ‘I had come to the conclusion that rigid individualism is a mistake. After all, what *is* or can be individual in the whole of the universe?’

The remark struck Mr. Wanless with some particularity, but he disguised his feelings.

‘Yes, Shiel, I agree with you, it is a mistake; but rigid aggregation is a worse one.’

‘You think so?’ And Shiel mused, adding ultimately—‘yes, of course.’

The clergyman did not stay as long as

Ebba had done, as he found it impossible to divert his son's mind from this train of reflection. After discussing the matter with such brightness of touch as occurred to him, he rose with some abruptness perhaps, and held forth his hand.

‘We will talk of it more fully on a more favourable occasion,’ he said. ‘You will come to Linnbrig when you can travel?’ The two pairs of eyes encountered, and the hands completed the understanding.

‘Yes, father, I should like to.’ Adding with a smile, ‘I have had curlews on the brain.’ Affecting to smile also, the visitor escaped from the room.

Ebba, having effected such supplements of a personal nature as she deemed absolutely indispensable, in the course of the following day took her way to Craven

Hill, where she met with such reception as persistent circumstances had compelled her to expect. The time of her arrival had been appointed, and she found that Mr. Smart had condescended to add his presence to that of the two ladies, in order to ensure an unmistakable welcome. The gentleman's attitude to the arrangement had not been before made manifest, although his sister at least, if none other, must have had a shrewd suspicion of his opinion.

It was to her that Cuthbert had entered upon his return home after that afternoon visit of Mr. Wanless and his daughter, and a few words had been exchanged between them upon it.

'They are coming, Ciss?' said Cuthbert, looking into her face.

The young lady had shaken her head in unmistakable negative.

‘Not?’ cried he.

‘No,’ was the emphatic rejoinder. But Cuthbert seized his sister’s wrist, and he was enlightened. ‘You dissembler . . . then when does *she* come?’

Cuthbert was gradually informed, and thereafter they talked for a minute or two amicably.

Having afforded his greeting to Ebba, Cuthbert disappeared, and Cicely bore off her visitor to the secret enchantments of her own boudoir.

The days which this simple maiden from the hills was to pass under the roof of a benevolent widow, of average refinement and sufficient means, were to prove, to the intelligence chiefly affected, days of

magic glow and inspiration. Ebba had never affected to disown the fascinations which purely human civilization can afford; nothing in her constitution had ever led her to other than a rational appreciation of them. Beyond such as is open to any most distant spectator, she had never had any sort of practical contact with such phases; nor had her domestic circumstances and antecedents held out the smallest promises of such. So utterly was such a world beyond her, so devoid of any kind of practical suggestion, that like Elia in the stately corridors of the great, she could hold the whole of it in fee by sheer force of a stimulating imagination. It could delight, and even fascinate her, just as any other exquisite creation of art could delight and fascinate, but nothing further.

The merely vulgar aspirations towards familiarity and possession in regard to such necessarily restricted dainties held no place in Ebba. Nay, had she ever got as far as conscious reflection in such respect, it might inevitably have seemed to her that possession would dim the charm of the creation, by just depriving it of that extrinsic imaginative halo in which so much of the æsthetic sense is seen to lie.

That Ebba should by sheer force of casual circumstance have been even for a moment cast into the midst of such ideal conditions was impressive enough, but it chanced that this was not to exhaust the critical elements in the situation. Even since that unexpected visit of Mr. Smart and his sister to the Linnbrig vicarage, the young lady had not been able to rid herself

of a disturbing personal sensation with regard to this particular family. She was never now able to think of them with the merely amiable complaisance commonly accorded to congenial acquaintanceship. Despite the slightness of their intercourse, a degree of mutual intelligence, intimate reciprocation even, had established itself as by instinct between them. From this Cuthbert himself was not excluded, at least in Ebba's part of it, the whole of her somewhat aggressive womanly independence notwithstanding. In such slight intercourse with mankind as she had hitherto had, a placidly intellectual, yet critical, self-possession had been her chiefest characteristic. It was not upon sentiment that Ebba took her stand. But in the single respect of Mr. Cuthbert Smart more or less

modification of this independent standpoint had to be confessed.

Beyond incarnate geniality and smoothness, made dignified by modest intellectual culture very far from contemptible, there was nothing very pronounced in Mr. Smart. A polite sense of humour kept him in remarkably even balance; he had never been pledged to any cause, affected or sincere. He found the world distinctly enjoyable, and so far as it was in his restricted power he would have made it equally enjoyable to everybody about him. This was the modest sum of his virtues, and of vices, it has to be confessed, he was in the odd predicament of as yet not having disclosed any. His connoisseurship in the merits of the vintages of Burgundy was his redeeming amiable weakness, but even

that had never been known to betray him into anything exceeding the limits of reason and gentility. He had never displayed towards Ebba any attitude savouring of sentimentality, and yet that her company was something more than congenial to him, circumstances seemed to leave scarcely any room for doubt.

During her sojourn as the guest of his mother, Cuthbert's behaviour was regulated by a studied, it might have been thought, a supersensitive delicacy. All his pleasantries with Ebba were carried on in the presence of others; when they chanced to be for a moment alone, some sober topic was invariably adopted. As an escort to places of entertainment, Cuthbert was assiduously dutiful, and it might have been that he displayed marked

pleasure where their visitor evinced obvious enjoyment.

But, all this notwithstanding, not a single one in the circle could doubt that silvery gossamer threads were rapidly a-weaving. Even Ebba at times keenly experienced the delicate tension. Her wings were not flapped in that old exuberant freedom; mystic encumbrances would meet them in the radiant atmosphere, and quietly restrain their endeavour. Nor did it arouse much impatience: Ebba's philosophy was maturing. But the golden days equally with the sombre have an end, and to those particular ones had come a limit. It had been announced that Shiel was permitted to travel. The doctors strongly recommended a genial climate at the outset, but the invalid shook his head. He

would go nowhere but to the hills; so arrangements were speedily completed.

The night before Ebba departed, she was indulged in her final diversion. Cuthbert escorted the two younger ladies to some particular concert, and so great had been their satisfaction that all could pronounce it a fitting conclusion to the days that had gone before. Even the gentleman seemed unusually expansive, and so they journeyed to Craven Hill. In the sacred precincts of this enchanted dwelling the hilarity was amply sustained, Cuthbert alone perhaps betraying any accession of reserve. The subtle influences of her situation had throughout the evening been closing around Ebba with mysterious force, but just now she was aware of a momentary calm. The imminent change seemed to

have already imparted to her some of its wider freedom, and the old buoyancy was asserting its prior claims.

Whilst they talked thus, partaking of appropriate refreshment, the elder lady had withdrawn, but this involved no diminution of good spirits. Cicely and Ebba kept up the flow of speech, Mr. Smart being permitted to trifle with a cigar. A minute or two later, Cuthbert coming back found the visitor momentarily alone. His heart leapt as he calmly placed himself in the chair he had but just left.

‘Well, it’s at an end,’ said he, ‘but there is no necessity why this should be the last. Is there, Miss Wanless?’

‘I should be sorry to think so,’ returned Ebba, gaily, secure in the hitherto respected privacy.

‘That is something gained. I thought that perhaps secretly you shared something of your family’s philosophy.’

‘Very little, I fear. Civilization is a vast enjoyment to me; in its place a powerful stimulus. Have I returned your kindness so badly, Mr. Smart? Have I seemed to be so wretched?’

‘By no means; I rejoice to feel that you have seemed remarkably happy. “In its place.” That is about my own experience. I enjoy judicious blends most. I could not tolerate this always. You must come to see us next in the country. My mother prefers her Surrey, but Dorset for me. Did Shiel tell you much about it?’

‘Not a word.’

‘Oh, you would enjoy it,’ exclaimed Cuthbert, with fervour. ‘I believe I may

presume to gauge your taste so far. There is more of the warm poetical than in your beloved moors. You will come down there, won't you ?

‘ We are looking forward,’ laughed Ebba.

‘ Why not ?’ asked he, looking into her face. ‘ You leave us to-morrow.’

Ebba grew tremulous, and wished for Cicely to return.

‘ Is not the greater half of our life a looking forward, and then the rest a looking back ? I didn't mean to be learned, though. You will permit me to say that life would not be much to me if I could not look forward to the time of seeing you again.’

‘ I am sure I wish you a more profitable outlook,’ said Ebba, attempting still to support the lighter vein. ‘ I visit very

little, for my presence is somewhat necessary at home.'

'Our moments are limited,' Cuthbert returned. 'You know what I mean and would say, Miss Wanless. My sentiment is only of the ancient kind, and I can't turn it into anything advanced if I try. Antique as it is, you will not forbid it?'

'Spare me this, Mr. Smart,' said Ebba, more warmly, looking with appeal into his face.

'I cannot,' answered he, leaning further forward. 'I cannot let you go without a word this time.'

'I am not in a position to discuss it,' urged Ebba.

'You do not repudiate such a subject? No, no, you cannot.'

'Upon general grounds by no means.'

I only refer to entirely peculiar and personal conditions.'

'But only temporary.'

'In such a connection I may not consider that. At present it is conclusive.'

There was no suspicion of indecision.

'Then you will forgive me the word,' said Smart, laying his hand nevertheless lightly upon hers.

Ebba returned his look, and coloured deeply, permitting his fingers the momentary satisfaction by way of absolution.

'I should be irredeemable otherwise,' smiled she, and they resumed their natural positions.

It was a day or two before that Ebba had been for her final interview with Handsel, to find little change in that self-

contained personage; the only possible modification in any way apparent being a passing reference she had made to her solitary position. Needless to say, however, that the hour they had spent together was the reverse of gloomy. It was not a cheerful day externally, nevertheless; when Ebba found it necessary to take her departure, Handsel set off to accompany her, at least to the point where the omnibus could be taken. As they turned into Great Russell Street, Ebba was talking vivaciously of all the buoyant enterprise of which her enthusiastic mind was full, and her companion wholly absorbed in the sympathetic communion. Passing the great iron gateway through which one or two preoccupied passengers went and came, the girls did not so much as turn

their eyes. But they had not proceeded many yards beyond, when hurried steps were audible behind them. It did not arouse any diversion of their thoughts, as such a sound in such a locality could hardly suggest personal import. At a voice, however, both Handsel and Ebba turned abruptly, and were face to face with Miss Augusta Lavington.

Mutual surprises got over, energetic interchange of goodwill ensued. Ebba viewed her former enthusiastic ally with interest, but not without a quick sympathetic concern. There seemed some subtle physical change in Augusta,—some deficiency of that brilliant enthusiasm which had before played so obviously about her.

‘Why haven’t you written?’ cried Ebba, in tones of amicable reproach.

‘Every day I intended to,’ was the laughing reply. ‘But you know the value of good intentions with regard to correspondence. Oh, it is delightful to see you. And both just the same. It seems years since I saw you.’

‘But the northern capital hasn’t agreed with you,’ remarked Ebba.

‘It hasn’t. I haven’t been at all well, and I have given it up.’

‘What, the whole of your enterprise?’

Ebba wished she had not put it so plumply, for Augusta visibly winced.

‘All of it,’ she said. ‘They—well, they wouldn’t let me do it in the manner I wished; and the fact is, we quarrelled and severed our connection.’

There was perhaps some lack of proper aggression in the tone of the revelation,

some suspicion of unexplained reserve,—but Ebba skilfully took it up and carried it off triumphantly. All willingly plunged into other themes.

In face of this it was impossible to depart so speedily as Miss Wanless had intended, so they all turned up the quiet Gower Street, and prolonged their intercourse for an additional ten minutes. Ebba gladly sustained the bulk of the conversation, and displayed a marked freedom from reticence with regard to her various doings. It was impossible for her to forget what she personally owed to Miss Lavington, had not definite personal affection been enough to promote a full measure of geniality. Under the stimulating familiar intercourse Augusta quickly recovered much of her old vivacity. It

was not until Ebba found it absolutely necessary to leave them that she managed to draw Miss Lavington aside.

‘I don’t care for ceremony,’ she said, hastily. ‘You have got something else to do?’

The questioner’s glance explained the rest.

‘Not very definite as yet; but I understand your goodness. Funds are ample.’

‘Absolutely.’

‘Absolutely. I will write fully to you. You leave soon?’

‘In a day or two. You have just come to the recovery of Handsel. She was meditating sheep in the hills. I shall depart happy now.’

They then separated. Handsel and Augusta going away in company.

The figure of the disappointed journalist

dwelt for some time with Ebba, and did not exhilarate her. That the spiritual check given to her enterprise was the main source of the disquiet, it had not been difficult to perceive; and to the other enthusiast, herself at the very zenith of her own ideal aspirations, such a reverse seemed incalculably more tragic than any quantity of material losses. For the day or two that were to follow Ebba found many distractions to draw her mind away from the contemplation of adverse topics, but Augusta's face persistently recurred to her at odd and unoccupied moments.

When at length she found herself alone with Shiel in a third-class railway-carriage, rattling away to her autumnal northern solitudes, all that world of enchantment faded as effectually into the dim haze of

an ecstatic dream as any other of her unsubstantial visions ; the subdued features of the convalescent before her seemed to recall more vividly the pathetic glance of those other eyes which she had seen. Both betrayed so irresistibly the shadier aspect of human impulse, and in one so circumspect as Ebba it must have been a matter of more or less determined effort to avoid an application to more personal concerns of the sinister theory suggested.

It was a day of golden sunshine and contrasted greys that the two travelled to the north. As they flitted feverishly across the land, Shiel's eyes would rest in complacent repose upon the wide expanse of pastoral calm afforded by the country through which they passed ; but, as soon as they entered a patch consecrated to the

dun forces of human enterprise, he occupied himself wholly with such literature as had been provided. They spoke but seldom, and only upon such trivial topics as were suggested by their route.

When they had passed York, Shiel's spirits seemed to revive a little, and he pointed out such glimpses of the hills as were obtainable from time to time. The blighted fields of Durham again checked him, and as they entered Newcastle he exchanged a significant glance with his sister. That last obstruction surmounted, he gave an audible breath of relief.

'I am not altogether sound yet, Abb,' he said. 'Those appalling centres disturb me ridiculously. They seem to oppose me, to thrust upon me a sense of conflict which isn't exactly pleasant.'

‘They are behind,’ replied she, not without a suspicion of exhilaration in herself at the reflection. ‘The hills are before.’

To the unaffected surprise of both of them, Mr. Wanless himself was upon the platform where they alighted, and greeted them with accustomed dignity.

‘Not too tired, Shiel?’ said he, as they took their seats in the closed vehicle which the clergyman had provided for their hillward drive.

Shiel swallowed the twilight air, and disclaimed all sense of having travelled at all. Then they rumbled on for many miles, over lonely roads, under trees and in the open, passing a village here and catching a distant window-light there, whilst the moon was getting up and throwing weird shadows over all.

As Shiel entered the startling quietude of the warm, crimson dining-room at the vicarage, Ebba saw a complacent smile illumine his pale features for an instant, but it was repressed as the clergyman followed and made some trivial remark to them. Ebba saw no reason for any such reticent behaviour, and, in her momentary ecstatic abandonment, she leant down and snatched a purring cat from the hearthrug, which she held at arm's length above her, gazing at it hanging there.

‘Well, old Mycher, and how are you?’ she cried.

‘Come, Nabbs, we are ravenous,’ commented the vicar, as he went out to make ready.

‘My old room?’ whispered Shiel, in the ear of his sister from behind, and so

startled her that she dropped the cat. Turning abruptly, she caught her brother's face between her hands and kissed him.

‘The varry self and same,’ she said, in vigorous vernacular.

Shiel accompanied her upstairs. When in her own room Ebba heard a window opened, and her instinct immediately construed it.

‘Don’t catch cold, Shiel,’ she cried, from her doorway.

But for a minute or two the man leaned outwards—the sweep of moorlands before him beneath the moon, the burn at one point showing a ripple of silver; no kind of sound except the full babble of the water.

As he lowered the sash Shiel suspected that he had never come *home* before.

CHAPTER VI.

SHIEL RESOLVES.

YET once again Shiel's eyes were resting upon that familiar scene with which so much of his inner life, and all the stress and turmoil resulting from it, had been so mysteriously involved. And yet how unspeakably still, how serenely contemplative all this now appeared. This quiescent aspect was prominently presented during those first autumn days that he spent within his father's vicarage, and perhaps

something of the flagrant incongruity of his own past life was presented with it. Grey brooding clouds floated solemnly over the hills, reducing all to a sombre reflective shade, in which he found himself able to take a placid and unfamiliar part. Since his recovery from illness this placidity, this intellectual acquiescence which sundered him so immeasurably from a former period seemed to have come without the slightest conscious effort of his own. All the world seemed to be more at peace with him, without his in the least knowing why. He had betrayed something of his tendency in the first interview he had had with his father, and with gathering strength his meditation seemed to be confirmed rather than to receive any disturbing influence. Any suggestion of conflict vaguely ruffled

his nerves, as he had disclosed to his sister in that remark made in the train, but in his present position he was saved from all disquieting hint of this kind. And yet as day after day went by his old enthusiasm seemed in a great measure to be returning. He read largely, chiefly poetry, and he spoke without reserve to his father or sister upon anything arising from the subject matter.

One day, after he had been there upwards of a week, sitting in Ebba's room with her, and their talk chancing to turn upon a passage from an elder poet, Shiel rose to fetch the volume from the library.

'Father is busy there,' said his sister. 'Don't disturb him.'

'Don't you ever sit in there now? Not in the evenings?'

‘Never;’ and the eyes of the two encountered.

‘Why not, Abb?’

‘I shall have to tell you, Shiel, so may as well do so now. The library does not exist; father has sold it.’

‘Sold his library? . . . but not all of it.’

‘All; every volume.’

Such a disclosure required some digesting, and the young man withdrew to the window to effect it. Presently he returned.

‘Through me somehow, I suppose; but how?’

‘Not through you.’

Ebba explained so far as she could the circumstances of the disaster, in her ignorance of course attributing it exclusively to her father’s supersensitive scruples.

‘No word has ever been exchanged be-

tween us about it, and of course you must not make the remotest reference to the subject.'

'Of course not.'

Shiel sat down again and appeared to read for a long time in silence.

'What an appalling personal interdependence there is in the universe,' he exclaimed at length, looking up abruptly.

'Isn't it one of the main secrets of the universe?' asked Ebba.

'One of the best solutions of it, I believe, if properly interpreted.'

'By personal affection?'

'Personal and universal; personal to supply the necessary daily stimulus, the concrete type. It is an awkward thing to repudiate human nature,' pursued Shiel, smiling. 'If from the first we would only

believe that there *is* no new thing under the sun! The world would be a simple place. And yet here have we one after the other to struggle and die for what ages have been trying to drive into us in vain. An amazing waste of energy.'

'Blessed are the conventional,' laughed Ebba.'

'Undoubtedly,—it has to come, for the bulk of convention is nothing but application of inexorable human experience. After all, our few thousands of generations of ancestors can't have been all fools.'

'Probably not.'

'And there is something in being a link in such a chain, say what we will,' Shiel added, with some additional fervour, Ebba applying herself closely to her pencil the while. 'But poor father—oh, Abb, it is

horrible!" Therewith he left her, and wrapping himself up went out into the open air.

This blow to Shiel's awakening sense of purely personal devotion was a severe one, for through it what he had formerly deemed his own philosophical attitude to the universe was once again prominently suggested, thrust forward in a novel and by no means wholly attractive light. That ridiculous illogicality whereby personal responsibility could be attributed to any involuntary visitant to this chaotic planet was somewhat further displaced in his imagination by this vivid presentment of his silent father undergoing what Shiel's own sense presented to him as little short of a cataclysm. That he was himself in some unexplained manner the sole cause

of the catastrophe he could not resist, and under the later development this could present very unacceptable features. He took the track leading down to the burn-side.

To-day the clouds had parted with occasional rain, and it was a beautiful autumn afternoon, of the kind whereby October betrays its kinship with the days of spring. Majestic heaped-up clouds rode in the clearest blue, the golden sunlight illumining fitfully the variegated moorlands. The rich brown bracken contrasted with the darker, duller heath, and in the deep green fir plantation could be seen the sprinkling of mellow larch. A bracing stimulating day, upon which such spirit as Shiel's could not fail to be impressed by the striking interdependence of mind and matter. He had come out with this topic on his mind, and,

although his present method of reflection was in marked contrast to his earlier vehement one, it engaged him deeply.

Some part of the vanity of his savage isolation had been instinctively apparent to him ever since he had reawakened to consciousness in his hospital bed. Short of the compromise of self-annihilation, he suspected that independence was not permitted by the universal law : and it is no doubt of supreme significance that throughout his intensest moments the suggestion of this ignoble compromise had never once occurred. Mere lack of physical courage was never an element in Shiel's disease, whatever else there may have been.

Of the gist of this later reflection he had never spoken To the casual observer, or even to one so far informed as was his

sister Ebba, it might have seemed that the mere reconstitution of his filial relations was his central point. It chanced, however, that this was but one (the main one, certainly,) of its supplementary features; the outcome of an even deeper sense.

There had been no obliteration of the glimpse which Glen had been the direct means of forcing upon his vision. That glimpse Shiel now found transformed into a calm but eager gaze, based not upon merely feverish impulse, but upon broad elemental needs. Concentrated personal devotion he suspected to contain the most definite clue to what his consciousness perceived as universal law: in it lay the stimulus to submissive action towards which alone his being could tend. Nirvana could offer no ultimate appeal to one

in whom energy had assumed the reins of life. The restricted outlook once definitely assured, it appeared to Shiel that very much might thereupon arise. For the moment, therefore, he rigidly confined himself to the central limitation, and this discovery in reference to his father forcibly promoted its cause. In about an hour he returned to the house.

‘I suppose you have lost all clue to Miss Lavington,’ he said later, in the course of some talk with his sister.

‘Oh, dear, no. I heard from her not long since.’

‘You did? You never told me.’

‘I never thought of its being of much interest to you.’

‘Not directly, certainly, but I should like to know what is her career. I had

an idea once that I was in love with her.'

Shiel smiled placidly at the announcement, and Ebba took it lightly.

'She was certainly not made for you.'

'I think not. She went abroad somewhere, didn't she?'

Ebba briefly narrated her friend's experiences as far as she knew them.

'Russia was Pettipher's own hobby,' commented Shiel.

'So she told me. He was there most of the time. But she is making some picturesque use of her experiences. She has papers in two of the magazines this month.'

'H'm, I should like to see them.'

'When are you going to try your pen again?' asked Ebba, putting boldly a question which had for a long time haunted her.

‘I? . . . Thank goodness that craze is done with.’

‘Craze? But you will write——’

‘I trust never in my life again. The art, Abb, that you threatened me with I mean to put into existence if possible, and by no means upon paper. Of creativeness I have none about me, and of evolving—well, don’t you think I have had enough?’

Ebba pursued the topic no further at that time.

The young lady herself received this apparently serious communication with some concern. Never had she wavered in her estimate of her brother’s intellectual power, and since to her instincts the highest display of such power lay in literary production, she had naturally planned out

for him a career of considerable distinction. Had not all his earliest years inevitably prompted and adequately sustained such generous aspirations? That she could herself now apply her insignificant talents to the modest accumulation of coin, in the service of a cause to which she had instinctively pledged her first effort and her life, was personal gratification enough, and she gloried in the issue : but for Shiel she had known definite ambition. He of all of them was to be great ; to add an unrecorded name to that glorious file of 'fame's eternal bead-roll,' wherein, it seemed to her, the whole of universal endeavour found its culminating height. And were a few more or less erratic papers in the slough of magazine to terminate it all? Ebba would never believe it.

Obvious it was that during those immediate days Shiel was not to display the slightest hint of a return to his former activities. He read largely, talked rationally and with frankness, but beyond transmitting a dutiful report or two upon his health to Cuthbert Smart, he never handled a pen. The inclination never for a moment assailed him.

Ebba, assiduous ever with her pencil, found but scant leisure to accompany Shiel in his peregrinations about the moors. His father went sometimes with him, but for the most part he roamed and meditated alone. He occasionally diverted himself by means of a visit to a neighbouring shepherd of his acquaintance, with whom he would indulge in technical discussions upon various matters incidental to flocks

and fleeces, but of any other society he had none. That Mr. Cornelius Pettipher was occasionally in the neighbourhood Shiel was aware; indeed the sound of a distant gun would from time to time emphasize the information, but neither of the fellow collegians made any movement towards a renewal of their undergraduate acquaintance.

The day at length came when Shiel considered that his contemplation might fitly find a practical outlet, and, returning from an afternoon ramble, he asked his sister for some note-paper.

‘I want to send a note to Handsel,’ was all he volunteered. If Ebba admitted any surprise, she effectually disguised it.

Shiel scribbled for a short time at a side table, in an open and apparently matter-

of-fact manner, and when he had done, the envelope lay addressed, as he had intimated, to Handsel. But all that he had written to her was this,—

‘DEAR HANDSEL,

‘As I am in hopes that you are familiar with the whereabouts of Glen, I send the enclosed for her to you, to make sure of its safely reaching her.

‘Yours,—S. W.’

The note enclosed was simply upon a sheet of note-paper interfolded, and marked, ‘For Glen.’

For a day or two thereafter, despite the marked degree of composure to which Shiel had attained, he had to confess a little exceptional perturbation. In a letter to Ebba, Handsel acknowledged Shiel’s

note, adding that she had sent on the other. As the matter had not been explained to Ebba, the allusion caused her slight mystification, but she delivered the message, and her brother did not just then seem disposed to enter into the matter further. When yet another day or two had elapsed, definite surprise possessed Shiel at Glen's unaccountable silence. He had felt little doubt but that reply would be immediate; and had there been anything wrong with her, surely Handsel would have mentioned it in writing.

Late one night, when their father had retired, Shiel lingered with his sister, reading. The night had set in rainy, and the wind flung its burden roughly against the window in murmuring gusts. Indoors all was silent enough, until Shiel raised

his face from the page over which he had been bending, and spoke to his companion.

‘I am going to marry Glen, Abb, and be a shepherd,’ said he, fixing his eyes upon Ebba to construe her method of receiving it.

‘Yes,’ said she, quite composedly, for the announcement assailed her at such remote quarters as scarcely to have consciously reached her. ‘Be a shepherd,’ she added, more reflectively.

‘What do you say to it?’

‘It is scarcely a matter for discussion, Shiel. Our opinions are alike upon such topics. But, marry Glen,—haven’t you heard?’

‘Heard? What has become of her?’

‘She was married to James Gilholme some time ago.’

For some seconds Shiel simply stared at his sister in silence. What was the exact effect of the announcement upon him, not a muscle of his face disclosed. It might have been thought that he was seeking the effect from her.

‘To James,’ he mused, and transferred his gaze to the fire.

The effect could scarcely have been a simple one, from whatsoever point of view regarded. The matter which was involved in it had been for so long now the moving principle of Shiel’s daily meditations that such a comprehensive check must have come like a subversal of his whole mental system. Mere shock of calamity or the reverse had no place in this initial consequence: it was merely staggering astonishment.

As soon as his mind had become habituated to the mere existence of the fact, he could enter upon a review of the concomitant circumstances. Instinctively and unconsciously puritan as so much of Shiel's texture undoubtedly was, strictly moral perturbation had never been able to effect the slightest footing within him. In personal responsibility for any agency in moral or physical degradation it had never been necessary for him to graduate, and it must have been by means of this only that he had ever been able to arrive at his critical conclusion with regard to his own and to Glen's predicament. In the face, however, of this newly-acquired information, certain fresh aspects were presented, and he regarded them with an undoubted measure of disquiet.

Shiel could not claim James Gilholme's altitude of religious conviction, therefore to him the affair appeared much more as it would appear to the general world, and on several accounts it irked him. For James Gilholme he had from every point of view a sincere regard, and of his passion for Glen we know Shiel had distinctly more than a merely general knowledge. That it could by the remotest possibility have had any such practical termination as this, he could reasonably have placed beyond the range of any ordinary suspicion; but Shiel's was not the mind for seeking refuge under any such plausible extenuation. His anger was once more aroused against himself, and (for even Shiel was no more than human) in a less degree against his wily accomplice. James

had not only reposed extraordinary confidence in this friend of his boyhood by disclosing those initial misgivings of his own, but had he not therefore gone further, and practically entrusted some of Glen's weakness to his care? There might have been somebody to urge certain considerations on behalf even of Shiel in this matter, but it could not be Shiel himself.

‘Do you know anything of the circumstances?’ he asked his sister.

Ebba did not, for even Handsel had been reticent. The particulars of the young minister's preferment and the locality of his abode were of course disclosed, but of the purely personal details none were forthcoming. From one or two general words of Handsel's, Abb presumed that it had been simply a matter of principle on the part of James.

For that night no more was said, Shiel very soon withdrawing to his sleepless couch.

Since Shiel's arrival in the house, Ebba had found her smuggling duties very materially interfered with. Her brother generally continued with her until it was impossible to pretend further labour, and she had not brought herself to the point of revealing to him the task in which she was engaged. It thus came that volumes had accumulated on her hands, and, seeing the mood in which he had that night left her, she immediately resolved upon an acceptance of the proffered opportunity. It thus came that she was lingering for some minutes after he had gone.

When all was quiet, Ebba set about a speedy and noiseless execution of her

secret task. She opened her own door without any sound, and having first descended to unlock the door below and place a candle upon the library table, she returned to fetch the first armful of books. At the foot of the stairs she paused to listen, but there was nothing save the rain outside and the swollen tumble of the burn. Volume after volume she placed upon the shelves in the precise place from which its corresponding predecessor had disappeared, and, as she regarded the increasing number presented, her eyes betrayed the fervent satisfaction within. Two such lots had she carried down, and enough for one more alone remained. She came with alacrity from the library doorway, ascending the stairs nimbly in her shoeless feet. Scarcely had she got half-

way, when the horror of an opening door assailed her, and in the light which issued from her own room Shiel appeared. He passed in before her.

‘What *are* you doing, Abb?’ he said, meeting her look with tender alarm. ‘You little lonely woman——’

She imposed silence with an imperious finger.

‘Then I must tell you this, too,’ she said, with a little impatience. ‘Follow me.’

She took up the last lot of books, and preceded him down the staircase. He entered the library behind her, and looked around. About to ask for an explanation of her surreptitious movements, the explanation occurred to him, and he held his peace.

'But he finds them,' whispered he.

'Isn't it grand?' she said, simply pointing to the volumes, and then led him away.

In her own room they paused again to exchange a few explanatory words, and then finally separated for the night.

If Shiel felt sleepless before, this incident more than confirmed his condition. The spectacle of his sister's unremitting solitary toil, for rewards such as this midnight glimpse afforded, presented just then inordinate appeal to him. The sudden frustration of his own central idea of recent weeks no doubt rendered him peculiarly susceptible to the more emotional element in the situation. He saw his sister in an exaggerated halo of heroism, and himself—— But mere self-reproba-

tion formed not even then the material part of his reflection. A stimulating flow of regenerating sentiment pervaded him, and Ebba reaped the warmth which it seemed impossible to confine within its native limits. But even this did not exhaust its superfluous energy, for it was in the course of that night that Shiel got up to scribble by the candle the following words :

‘ DEAR GLEN,

‘ Of course I wrote my former note in complete ignorance of your present position. I thought that you were still in London, otherwise I should not have broken the silence of the late weeks. I am very glad that you have not replied to it. No doubt you will have shown it

to James, and, when you have done the same with this, I shall be glad if you will ask him to burn it.

‘SHIEL WANLESS.’

The following morning Shiel re-read the words, and sent them.

To this letter, however, he received a speedy reply, which somewhat surprised him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRIUMPH.

‘ You, Handsel, at least, know the whole of my position. The rest is between me and my conscience. I am not able to persuade myself that I have to offer a defence to anybody else whatsoever. My announcement seems to have been received with some surprise. Our good Mr. Reid enters somewhat, I fancy, into my attitude, for he has written most kindly, and with a complete absence of that indirect spirit of deprecation which some have seen fit to

assume in this connection. I shall come up next Monday. Glen herself has no doubt told you all the rest.'

Thus had written the Rev. James Gilholme to his sister, a short time after her final reception of the defeated Glen. In a fit of pique had this latter young woman fled from the desolate moors as a supreme stroke towards her unconditional triumph. By various expedients, with which we are sufficiently acquainted, had she managed to sustain and develope this fit: the latest being that definite resolve to write to the importunate James 'about herself.' Of marriage as a conventional institution Glen was hardly likely to hold any very exalted views; but, such as it was, that James ardently wished it, in direct reference to herself, she was fully aware. In

her then predicament it was a piquant thought, and with characteristic alacrity she entertained it. That it was purely for entertainment she amply recognized, but without some such comprehensive diversion the days would have been unendurable. Day after day went by, and no signal of humiliation appeared so much as on the farthest horizon. Since leaving him so abruptly she could not hear one word of Shiel. With the only one from whom she could have had the fullest particulars she felt unable to speak; for that Handsel had been inordinately kind to her she could still readily admit, and of course that Handsel was herself in love with Shiel even yet she had never for an instant doubted. There was then a spark of grace even in poor little Glen.

Day by day her perceptions grew more and more confused, hysterical anger having now appropriated them for its own. Of *his* passionate devotion she would not, could not doubt; and upon self-consuming vanity, could not her own little breast sufficiently enlighten her? So it became but a contest of individual pride. He would not come to her; she would not, could not, go to him. She would suffer her heart to be torn into a thousand fragments rather than that she should relinquish one jot of this consuming thing. Oh, how he should suffer! What humiliation she would exact! But still his pride held out. Thus it came that letter after letter had been exchanged with James, solely as a means of entertainment.

But one effect even of entertainment

is, that it can familiarize the idea of which it treats. The purely imaginary presentment has a peculiar power of furthering the real. 'Supposing I should go and marry James,' was the question which one day was inevitably to suggest. Glen did momentarily quail before it, for she so detested the man; but afterwards she was able to recall it with greater composure. The humiliation would be so supreme; in this all else was merged. By eventide, if that letter had not come by Friday she would—think again. By Friday the letter had not come and Glen thought again. 'On Monday I will write,' and on Monday she did write.

Once in the vortex, the little brain was carried speedily down. Under the peculiar circumstances, James being now set-

tled in his manse, there was no occasion for delay. Nay, Glen could not delay. She recognised herself so far as to fear that if she did delay she might deprive herself of this supreme vengeance, by delaying for a day too long. She appointed therefore an early day, and to it James came with speed. In a metropolitan Presbyterian church the ceremony was performed.

Handsel witnessed the achievement with trepidation enough, but ignorant of much, she was spared the greater measure of disquiet which might have possibly assailed her. Despite all her brother's sincerely devout assurances, she could not rid herself of her purely worldly perceptions, and she confessed to herself that if by this Glen were to be saved, then it

must be by nothing short of a miracle, and latter-day miracles she was sceptic enough to view distrustfully. James's ardent faith was, however, ample for all. There was a triumphant radiance apparent in the young minister such as the generous ardour of youth is apt to present to the cold stare of an unbelieving world, when its cynical creed has been for once flagrantly defeated. To him the victory was a solemn matter; as largely a matter of piety as of personal joy. But, in James, piety and joy were merely interchangeable sensations, each inherent in the other, neither of which could have any sort of existence alone. That day full life began.

In accordance with very strongly maintained theories of the bridegroom's upon the subject of honeymoons, James and his

wife proceeded direct from London to the secluded manse in the hills which was thenceforth to be their joint home. It was in every respect such as the minister had described it, an ideal abode for anybody of a quiet mind and sincerely philosophic intentions. It was some little way removed from the village to which it appertained, with a garden and small pasture field for cow or pony adjoining. Hills wooded and partly in cultivation rose around, imparting a genial aspect to the more or less barren land.

The placid scene, the novel sense of domestic possession and calm, and the genial, even tender, welcome accorded (gossip notwithstanding) to the minister's young wife, for the moment quite disarmed Glen. During the first days of her

residence she wept freely, entered vehemently into her husband's devotional exertions, and believed, even herself, that there had been something lacking in her former construction of the world. New senses seemed to have birth in her, and with characteristic impetuosity she gave them immediate expression. Everybody admired her obvious prettiness, now so chastened and subdued, and even in conversion such gratifying element may exercise a subtle play.

James's behaviour was exemplary, and, what is more, sagacious. He obtruded nothing upon her, except, in restrained moderation, his ardent personal affection. Even this he had learned to display in numberless minor ways, entailing merely indirect contact, or pleasant surprise. To

anything of a strictly pastoral nature he introduced his wife with extreme caution and reserve, rightly no doubt considering that the merely personal development demanded sufficient initial strain.

For fully a fortnight did things proceed in this inordinately even way, until one morning Glen was to awake to a world enveloped in fog. Directly she had caught a glimpse of the dreary void, she crawled back into bed and resolved to partake of breakfast in that retirement. As she was alone she began to muse upon the various topics which, void as it was, that world had suggested.

James, who was an early riser, and a man of method generally, duly emerged from his study and was quickly apprised of the young mistress's intentions. In a state

of tender solicitude he hastened upstairs.

‘Oh, James, isn’t it horrid?’

‘Do you feel ill——’

‘That wretched fog,’ interposed Glen, voluntarily chattering her teeth.

‘Poor little pet; it is rather a chilly morning. I will put a match.’

The fire was laid ready for ignition, and very soon the wood was crackling merrily in the grate. After a few more words of endearment, James withdrew, and Glen turned so that her eyes might gather satisfaction from the flame.

Attended, of course, by no other hands than those of her husband, the delicate frame began to acquire a greater measure of resistance, and as soon as the carefully chosen viands had been complacently consumed, and the coal was giving forth a

genial glow, Glen resolved to confront the universe.

But try as she would, the effect of that sinister atmosphere was not wholly to be repelled. Glen was irritable with her servant, shrank from the tenderness of her husband, and showed that she meant to tolerate no company but her own. As James had other duties abroad, he readily acquiesced, and the housewife was left to her own moody reflections. For some time she most successfully convinced herself that it was the atmosphere alone which was at fault, and the sole cause of her physical and mental disquiet ; but as the morning advanced more or less definite association obtruded itself : and Glen indulged in a few resentful tears.

When her husband came in, he chanced

to be in an exceptionally buoyant mood, despite the hoary bloom of moisture which enveloped his black great-coat. He had had some peculiarly pleasant experience during the morning, in his professional capacity, and he had hastened back with it to his wife, forestalling no doubt all the way the thrilling pleasure which lurked in the sense of her fingers carefully removing his wrappings and taking them away to dry. As he entered the room, though, Glen looked up from the fire where she sat with her feet close to the bars, and made anything but a pretty face.

‘Oh, James, do get away!’ she cried. ‘You are wet through. Hang your coat up in the kitchen.’

James said something lightly, and went away.

That day of fog Glen seemed unable to throw off; it brought her a catarrhal cold, the spirits usually attendant, and for a whole week her husband had to experience that his little wife had after all a human side to her nature, which was not yet wholly overcome. But in martyrdom James was supreme. He willingly transformed himself into her slave; indulged her in every form of dainty which could by any means be procured, with princely disregard of his modest stipend. It was simple enough for himself to repudiate some supposed want and so make good the deficiency. A neighbour strongly recommended port-wine, and teetotal zealot that Mr. Gilholme upon principle was, he stretched his conscience here, and Glen did not deny herself the fruits of

his generous laxity. She found the wine extremely agreeable, and the benefit from it undoubted, so much so that when the cold was apparently surmounted she grudged the imminent loss of the vinous aid.

‘I have finished the last bottle of wine, James,’ she said, one day, with unusual tenderness to her husband.

‘Yes, darling, it did you good, I am sure. As a medicine these gifts are of value, but in their abuse—’

‘I am far from well; my chest is sore still. I think I had better continue it for a little—’

‘Dearest Glen,’ James began, solemnly; ‘you know that I would not deny—’

‘You will get me some more.’

‘Hear me, darling—’

‘Yes, I know what you mean ; you think I shall get a drunkard, and go about—’

‘Glen!’ appealed the minister. ‘Has my conduct given you such a poor opinion of my trust in you?’

‘I can’t possibly get through the winter without it, in these horrid, horrid hills. The fog will get into me, and I shall die.’

‘But, Glen—’

‘Now you have once got me here, you don’t care what I suffer.’

‘Glen, I cannot bear such words from you: do hear what I wish to say.’

‘I won’t hear what you wish to say. I will—’

But James fled impetuously from the room, and did not hear the remainder of her sentence. The next day some more wine

duly arrived, and her husband postponed the rest of his argument until her health had improved.

It was not many days after this minor domestic experience, one morning when Glen was partaking of her essential dose of the very wine which had been the subject of the discussion, that a letter came to her from Handsel. James was out, and the recipient herself tore open the envelope with a gesture of irritation. She only deigned to consider it as the means of momentary diversion in a world so unutterably——But in an instant she was upon her feet

In a frenzy of wild abandonment Glen was dancing about the room, clenching the letter in her little fist, and brandishing it defiantly aloft. In her face burned a ma-

licious glee, to which no possible words could give expression. After thus circling two or three times round the limits of the chamber, she stopped abruptly by the side of a cupboard and took out a bottle of wine. She refilled her glass, and holding it up to the light drained it in one draught. Then she replaced herself over the fire, and stared at that bit of paper which she had received. But the writing was not Handsel's. This was all:

‘DEAR GLEN,

‘I have been ill for a long time, else I should have written to you before. I want to talk to you, so will you let me know where you are.

‘Yours,

‘S. W.’

But Glen was shrewd enough to construe excuses. Ill, indeed ! and hadn't she too been ill ? But as if that prevented people from writing. Oh, the triumph was supreme ! The consummation now only lay with her.

What with the wine and the excitement, when James returned the appearance of his wife's features shocked him inexpressibly. That, coupled with an extraordinary alteration in her behaviour towards him, disclosed, as he thought, the horrors of the situation. Here rather more than the leniency of affection stepped in : human souls were at stake.

The young minister required a day or two amply to consider it. Not unnaturally, by misinterpretation he grossly exaggerated the premises. Glen, as a mat-

ter of fact, had never known the intemperate tendency which he inevitably suspected. She had failings enough to answer for without the imputation of any to which she was not entitled. Her present not extravagant indulgence had been solely the result of the depression arising from her unnatural situation. The wine had undoubtedly stimulated her, and thus appeared to make the intolerable circumstances less unbearable, therefore she had considered it a legitimate resource. But immediately this other and far more potent stimulus had been afforded her, she could fling the minor one away. When at length James came, fraught with a most ponderous burden of persuasion, his wife heard a few words, and then laughed in his face.

‘I am better now,’ she said. ‘Certainly give it all away.’

James, inexpressibly astounded, took her at her word, and the wine thenceforth disappeared.

The husband now looked for a reconstitution of their relationship with jubilant confidence, although Glen’s airy, nonchalant manner somewhat disconcerted him. It was a mood which he had not heretofore had to handle. She was unquestionably again kind to him, but singularly indifferent to his personal attentions. The proper accommodation seemed difficult of attainment.

It was scarcely wonderful that this difficulty should have been presented to one of this man’s disinterested purity of conviction, in the face of such complex

anomaly as that opposed to him. If James could for a moment have but realized that he himself entered not in the remotest manner into the point at issue, doubtless his task had been easier; but there was nobody to tell him this, and it was a fact scarcely to be excogitated under the circumstances.

Minds there are to which, what some of us call, principle does not exist; its place being inevitably taken by mere irrepresible interest or inclination. Glen's was one of such. The majority of them execute their span without either themselves or others being particularly conscious of their predicament; the fates smile, and flagrant circumstance does not assail them. Others there are whom the fates select for the illustration of their peculiar doctrine,

and of these it is to be feared Glen was also one. Circumstance seemed to have been instituted especially for her throughout the whole of her conscious career.

Glen's inclination now lay solely in the direction of triumph. A consuming sentimental passion, it is true, still formed the ultimate mainspring of her energy, but for the moment she kept that screened even from herself. The reality of her triumph rested wholly in the humiliation of Shiel; so she was persuaded, and upon such alone she built. Thus it was that, during these days she harboured, gathered from the furthest recesses of her fragile being, every particle of resentment that she could find there. He had made her await his pleasure; surely the simplest elements of retaliation necessitated his

now awaiting hers. The day would no doubt come when she should answer his appeal, but she would not at present fix it. She could pass her time in—well, for one thing, treating her husband cavalierly.

But these same fates are so inordinately fond of complexity. They do not choose to set a solitary ball a-rolling and bid it knock where it will. They prefer to set off series of balls on their way, with very precise instructions as to the circuitous route they are to follow, minding however, at their peril, to converge on this and this milestone, to record there their indelible marks. Glen could not be left to decide her own comparatively simple problem without the disconcerting interposition of one of these converging agents. One day there came to her that second letter from

Shiel, and there was hesitation no longer. She instantly posted this :

‘ DEAR SHIEL,

‘ I too have been ill. I will meet you at the Loanend Gate to-morrow night at six.

‘ Your

‘ GLEN.’

And the following morning, when her husband was out, she left the house, without giving her maid any particulars as to her return. Linnbrig was thirty miles away.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO WITNESSES.

IT had never for an instant occurred to Glen that Shiel would decline to concur in her appointment. The position had of course been wholly hers; his the humiliation only. It was this that she set forth to witness, and afterwards perchance of her royal clemency to administer some individual form of absolution. The world began to acquire a radiance of late entirely lost to it, for it was characteristic of the girl's disordered temperament that one

period of spiritual quietude should, under another distinct usurpation, assume the appearance of intolerable disquiet and restraint. How she loathed that domestic warmth and serenity from this wider view of piquant lawlessness. Nay, how had she for one instant endured it? How ever brought herself to submit to the galling bonds by which it had alone been instituted? . . . Quickly she found the answer. For this—this ecstatic triumph to which she was so madly hastening. That had sustained her; she had known that it would come: for it, would she not have endured a scourge to which this was incalculably less than nothing? Bonds! Glen flung her arms aloft to assert the fact that they were free.

Fortunately it was a fine, sunny day

this, so that, as soon as the fugitive had effected her circuitous and surreptitious escape from the purlieus of her husband's pastorate, she found nothing particularly disagreeable in the situation. Up this valley the railway ran, and if she could but reach the next station safely she could easily be transferred to a point from which she could get a necessary vehicle to convey her the remainder of her journey. Seeing that all was accomplished exactly as she desired, we need not follow Glen's movements in any detail.

The spot selected by Glen for her critical meeting lay off a lonely part of the road, about a mile and a half from Linnbrig. Some half a mile farther was the isolated inn known to the neighbourhood as the 'Loanend,' that being the name of

the farm-holding appurtenant to it. The specific gate chosen was an outlet from the open moorland, and stood between two dark fir plantations. In the calm autumn twilight Glen came hither, and as the light seemed stronger than she had expected at that evening hour, she crept into hiding in the wood adjacent, finding a screened point from which she herself could keep command of the field of interest.

It would not be accurate to pretend that the girl there fell into a definite reverie. Reflection was scarcely possible to Glen, least of all under these particular circumstances. The solemn natural surroundings undoubtedly exercised some indeterminate effect upon her, but tremulous expectancy exhausted every trace of conscious impression. Every faculty was centred

in that dim ghostly figure which was momentarily to appear before her. The twilight deepened rapidly, until at length it was necessary for her to alter her position. This time she did so boldly, and took her stand not many yards from the gate.

Glen's unquestioning acquiescence in the elements of her unconventional predicament was no doubt noteworthy. Ethically it could assail her no longer. Her estimate of Shiel and his philosophy was so supreme, perhaps, that the outlook of the common world had ceased to have any concern for her. She was quite content in the possession of a world of her own.

That apparently the same object, to say nothing of the same intellectual conception, may appear radically different from

two individual points of view, it had never occurred to Glen to consider. From the conviction that she and Mr. Shiel Wanless held identical opinions upon every possible moral consideration, Glen therefore could not have been easily dissuaded. Thus it was that she still strained her eyes in anticipation of his approach; but no phantom was to be seen.

The fact was that Shiel on his part had, after mature reflection, resolved to let things take their course, without any immediate interposition from him. The girl's remarkable conduct had astounded him, but even if she did come to the interview which she had appointed he need entertain no scruples on her behalf. She had evinced hitherto abundant capacity for taking care of herself; so be it once

again. Glen waited in vain, until at last she too had to admit the impossible. Then she crept away through the darkness to the shelter of the Loanend inn.

After a restless, feverish night, once more she issued into the morning sunlight. The moors looked peaceful and unconcerned, but Glen heeded them not. From that Loanend gateway, she could by a circuitous path attain to a position on the hill-side directly opposite the Linnbrig vicarage. Hitherwards she hastened, her eyes fixed immovably upon the ground, except when any forward glance was needful. After a rough and impetuous scramble she reached her destination, no sight or sound of human being having interrupted her course. There lay the old scene, spread out at her feet, but it aroused no

pleasurable emotions. After all it was mainly associated with sensations more or less disturbing, even if past association had been able at that moment to find place in her. As it was, all her faculties were centred in the present.

She crept stealthily down the hill-side, availing herself of every possible form of natural shelter, and in a little clump of alder and birch-trees fringing a crease above the Linn, she crouched to watch. An animal excitement gleamed from her brilliant eyes, and her lips, nay, her whole frame, quivered with excessive agitation, her heart throbbing audibly in her breast. Whether now actuated by love or hatred, she could not easily have said. All she knew was, that every nerve centred in that need of a sight of him ; for that alone was

she drawing her breath. Nor was she long kept in this state of intolerable suspense.

Out into the sunlight Shiel duly came ; and, yes, he was alone. At the vicarage gateway she saw him pause, her heart almost standing with him ; he looked this way and that, once into her very eyes, despite the few hundred yards between them, and then he advanced. Down to the burn he strode. She watched him leap it, apparently with as much agility as a mountain sheep. He had been ill—her lip curled. For an instant he was lost, and she had to alter her position to regain him. Was her heart to fail ? He was coming directly towards her.

Shiel frequently took his walk up this particular crease, although Glen had not

been aware of that. Had the fates been less propitious, there would have been little difference of result, for with her last strength Glen was fully resolved to intercept his course. Leisurely and placidly he came forward. Perhaps he had in truth been able to throw off that past fraction of his career as a phenomenon which no longer directly concerned him. Of formulated extenuation he was not the man to find, to need, much. The wind had blown, the trees had fallen, and the ground perhaps been cleared and smoothed thereafter. The new growth was now the main subject for consideration. But for all that, there still existed an aspect of the matter which hardly admitted of being ignored. His own estimate of the past was not the only feature which it present-

ed. It was at least just possible that another might even yet be thrust upon him, for the words of Glen's message remained vividly in his mind, and in view of her character it was far from unlikely that she was now in his very neighbourhood. He had that morning in some measure regretted his refusal of the appointment. He might have confided all to Ebba, met Glen, brought her for the night to the vicarage, and by this time she would have been securely on her homeward way, under the wing of his judicious sister. Something persistently tried to convince him that it would not have so ended, but it might have done; whereas now the unpleasant doubt was far wider open. His mind had travelled round to this just as he entered a clump of alder and birch-

trees which fringed the stream up which he had been walking. In entering the shade of them he looked up, and his eyes met those of Glen. Then Shiel stood, and they surveyed each other in silence. The man was the first to speak.

‘I thought you would have returned,’ he said, as it appeared without the slightest discomposure.

‘Without seeing you!’

‘Certainly. It would have been far better.’

This attitude all but disarmed her, so supremely contrary was it to anything that she had been able to foresee.

‘Without seeing you, Shiel?’

From the expression of her face he had expected anger, so that the tone which she now adopted startled him. There was

distinct appeal in it. Vague fears were confirmed in him, and he saw that in his own conduct alone did the decision lie.

‘Certainly,’ responded Shiel, firmly, sustaining her look. ‘You are married.’

For that word she knew that she hated him, and for an instant she recoiled. Her blanched features were fixed in an irrepressible stare upon his face, whilst she strove in tragic desperation to gather her scattered forces. The whole of her energies had been prepared for one set of circumstances only, so that to one of Glen’s extremely limited capacity, the sudden presentation of a series wholly different was not a little disconcerting. Everything had been planned out clearly enough in her mind, but not upon premises of this

nature. The whole world seemed cut from under her.

Melodramatic cringing, Glen had looked for; remorse, agonized appeal, vituperation of a conventional world,—oh, anything whereby her consuming vanity might have been acknowledged and established. All that could she adequately have handled, for upon it had not all the late weeks of her life been founded? Had he but pleaded on his knees; but there was not a sign of anguish about him.

‘But what is marriage to you?’ at length she vehemently retorted.

Shiel felt the force of the blow. Had his past life really given anybody the right thus to stab him? He gazed at his antagonist in momentary doubt, and from

her face he seemed to gather reassurance.

‘I don’t pretend to understand you. Return to your husband, and for his sake at least hide this wretched behaviour.’

No doubt Shiel rightly judged the strictly sympathetic treatment to be altogether beyond the limits of this case.

‘Husband!’ The word became distorted in the girl’s throat. ‘I—I detest him! . . . Oh, Shiel, you don’t know—’

‘How dare you speak to me like this. Go back, I tell you, and don’t try to drive me to anger.’

She had attempted to approach him, but he had thrust her away.

‘Come down to the vicarage,’ he added, more mildly, ‘and my sister will return with you.’

‘This is the end of all you have told

me,' cried Glen, a certain dignity being infused into her despairing attitude, and adding something to her slight, diminutive figure. 'This is what you call being above the world—of indep—pendent women. You hate and despise me, and call me what everybody else has called me. But I can tell you that you have no right to do so, Mr. Wanless. To you, at any rate, I have done no wrong. Ever since you met me on the bridge in Oxford there has been no other man in the whole world to me but you; and if I *have* watched you and followed you about, it is not because I am a bad, shameless girl, such as you and everybody else thinks me. The whole of my life has been in you; there was no day for me without you; and although you now throw me away like a bit of

poison, my life is better than yours, for I have had a love to drive me on, such as *you* can never know——’

She seemed to pause, and Shiel, tremulous, half raised his eyes from the ground upon which they were fixed; but Glen resumed.

‘Whatever I have gone through, do you think I am or can be married to anybody but you? Love, such a love as I had, is enough to marry us, let people say what they like. But I don’t think I—I have it now. N-no, I h-hate you,—oh, if I could tell you how much I hate you . . .’

‘Come down to the vicarage, Glen.’

‘I winna go a step with you.’

The young woman’s passionate tears seemed to choke her, and Shiel stood

silently by. At length he repeated his entreaty, perhaps more kindly. Thereat Glen looked up hurriedly, her eyes dim, and the tears glistening on her cheeks. She caught his arm.

‘Come with me, Shiel. You—you don’t know how I have loved you. If we love each other, there is nothing——’

Shiel quivered throughout his whole frame, not from any strife of passion in himself, but from a purely imaginative sympathy with the distress of the girl before him. But as she renewed her incoherent pleading, he drew himself firmly back. He saw no other refuge for her.

‘Glen, I have never had the slightest love for you.’ There was an almost brutal distinctness of enunciation in his utterance.

She drew back and stared at him.

‘Now will you come to the vicarage, and my sister will take you home.’

At length Glen could articulate a vehement repudiation, and Shiel turned and left her.

For a long time the girl sat or lay there in a state of stupefied despair. It was months now since she had abandoned herself to an unreasoning, but undoubtedly genuine passion for Shiel, promoted and sustained by all sorts of phantom theories which she fancied she had gained from him. To be bereft of this consuming motive to life, and to have only a blind frenzy of anger and hatred placed in its stead, was in itself disconcerting; but this did not exhaust the elements of Glen’s complicated predicament. Over and above

all this she loved herself, and it was at this point that she had received the direst blow. That all her presumed vengeance should have been non-existent; the consummate triumph a myth and a delusion; this was the essential sting. He had never loved her; she had never had any power over him. Facts seemed so completely to repudiate such an assertion, that her brain whirled in uncertainty and confusion as she dwelt upon it. Her only definite perception was the gross treachery of man, practised, it seemed clear, in this overwhelming instance, solely with the purpose of humiliating herself, and frustrating, or even making sport of her passionate devotion,—an intolerable reflection. Under its bewildering instigation, Glen at length fled from the place.

She wandered over the moor towards the Loanend, but slowly and without regard to the ground for her footsteps. As the muscles fell more easily into the downhill movement, she heedlessly tended downwards, whilst her nearest way lay over the shoulder of the hill. She stumbled amidst the wiry heather, and sunk repeatedly into the deep moss and peaty morasses. After proceeding like this for some time, in a state scarcely to be called consciousness, she became suddenly aware of the sound of a tumbling burn close beside her, and looking about saw that she had reached the bottom of the slope, and was by the stream which had its rugged course there. When she reached the very side of the water she found out her physical exhaustion, and as the sun smote the grass there

warmly, Glen instinctively sank down to rest, and she allowed her vacant gaze to settle upon the foaming, eddying current which was speeding amongst the stones.

In the meantime, Shiel had continued his walk too. He had felt the morning's incident immoderately disturbing. At one moment he even thought of disclosing the whole to Ebba, and entrusting himself solely to the guidance of her more practical wisdom ; but ultimately the consitutional reticence prevailed, and he resolved again that things must take their course. On Glen's personal behalf he could not long feel scruples. It was true, that her depth of feeling and emotion, as just betrayed to him, was startling and amazing ; nevertheless after this conclusive scene no doubt she would doggedly submit to the inevit-

able, and those turned pages would be for ever closed. That momentary harshness had arisen instinctively within him, but this later reflection fully sustained it as the inevitable course. No more delicate methods, he deemed, could Glen have understood. As he walked homewards, though, he modified his decision once again, determining this time that he would walk down the burn so far as the Loan-end, and himself accompany Glen to her home. Even Shiel at length perceived that some personal explanation of her conduct to her husband was desirable once for all, and that from himself it ought to come.

First he returned home to the mid-day meal, but throughout it he appeared more or less pre-occupied. He had not suc-

ceeded in entirely disposing of the matter. The importation of James Gilholme into the consideration invested it with its ugliest aspect. Contemplating it, nevertheless, he again went out in the afternoon.

Down the Linnburn he wandered, where the track (if track it could be called) grew rugged and secluded. The water tumbled and foamed, swollen by the autumn rain, and to Shiel's musing sense such scene was always congenial. He allowed his thoughts to expand, and to embrace the wider issues which Glen's irregular behaviour suggested. That even she could with such daring alacrity repudiate the conventional condition undoubtedly startled him; that she could deem himself the authority for such tactics touched him more nearly still. His own fiercest revolt had never exceeded

the repudiation of the need, and, as regarded those to come from it, the inherent justice, of such instituted convention. Not greater license, but the absolute extinction of such as already existed, had been his creed. The grounds of this revolutionary perception removed or modified, he could not but revert to the most rigid of traditional usages ; the least arraignment of them, for personal ends, villainous and loathsome. On the way he thought of writing to James, but herein seemed to lurk ignoble compromise, and the idea was immediately dismissed.

This resolve seemed to add briskness to his steps and he advanced with youthful vigour over the irregular ground. As he rounded a piece of rock, holding to the arm of a rowan-tree which grew out of a crevice,

he paused with one foot upon the shingle as his eye encountered a figure moving up the burn below. It was the figure of a man, who walked with a gun over his shoulder, and as Shiel was himself not exposed, he still stood to regard the sportsman. Instinctively he had recognized Mr. Cornelius Pettipher, and following upon his recent meditation, the apparition particularly impressed the beholder. Shiel had never liked the man, now he loathed him; yet his eyes were fixed in curious scrutiny upon him. A meeting seemed unnecessary, and again Shiel would have gone, but he gave one final look. Instantly his eyes became fixed in a resolute gaze.

Mr. Pettipher, who was clad in orthodox sporting attire, had, since Shiel's first seeing him, reached the edge of a pool which

the stream had formed just at the foot of a steep rock, on the opposite side of which was a small space of level grass, some few yards in extent. Here Pettipher stood, and without exactly knowing why, Shiel felt an inordinate curiosity in his behaviour there. The sportsman's eyes were fixed intently upon the water, then thrown stealthily around. With his gun, which he held by the muzzle for the purpose, he seemed to reach towards something which was just apparent to Shiel in the water. After a moment's effort Pettipher drew back his weapon, and raising himself at a bound to his natural height, he cast his eyes again hurriedly but more determinedly around him. Then Shiel leapt forth, striding down the burn. The other had taken a hasty stride or two, but at the appear-

ance of Shiel he stood motionless in his place. They were soon together. Only a look was exchanged, and then Pettipher pointed to the water at their side.

‘What is it?’ cried Shiel, his lips remaining apart.

‘I have been trying to see.’

‘Trying!’ was the furious response, and Shiel seized the gun.

Without difficulty that half-floating object was drawn towards the bank, and, with strong but tremulous fingers, Shiel clutched it. The water, too, clung tenaciously, as if unwilling to give up its prize, but Shiel was resolute. Pettipher now leaned forward as though to render assistance, but he was thrust silently away. With deliberate tenderness Shiel carried his cold and dripping burden to the extremity of the grass,

by the side of a mossy rock with ferns under it, and there he gently laid it down. With his own handkerchief he wiped the hair (like seaweed) from the face, for human face it bore, and then he composed the disordered garments about the body.

‘Now try to see again,’ said Shiel, to his companion, in a low tone. And Pettipher looked with him.

‘How came she here?’

Shiel only answered by dismissing him for aid, and afterwards placed his handkerchief open across the face.

In a state of intolerable agitation Shiel walked to and fro over that narrow piece of grass, hearing nothing but the plunging stream and once the clear whistle of a dipper flitting past him. No doubt the man had spoken literal truth when he

declared that he had never loved Glen, but that was audible speech intended for, as indeed it implied, a set of merely ephemeral human circumstances. Now he was confronting wider prospects, in which infinite eternal issues were alone involved. The shackles of this same trivial mundane circumstance had fallen away and only the soaring elements remained. Mere personal predilection or affinity could have no place here. Shiel, so vital was the recent modification of his perceptions, felt himself in the presence of one of the profoundest and most solemn primal mysteries of the universe,—a woman's body. It offered to him now no suggestions to be repudiated, no tyrannical injustice to generations unwillingly to be born : it was simply the central element or type of a vast, homo-

geneous and mystic creation, in which it was a solemn interest and privilege to have a part. All trivial adventitious adjuncts were swept away. From this little sacred body, perfect and still beautiful in its material earthly moulding, the fretting soul had fled, and as an exquisite type alone did it remain, capable of every loftiest construction which divine inspiration has seen fit to place upon the most exalted of its kind.

Of all services which this poor erring little mortal in her impetuous blind-folded manner had rendered Shiel, (and let us doubt not that they were ample,) this which her so-called senseless clay had now finally rendered him was highest of all. It revealed, as by a lightning flash, the profundity of the rest, and gave to all the im-

perishable crown of a boundless spirituality, without which service and experiences can be of little but gross and ephemeral avail. A result such as this might perhaps not be deemed an inadequate expiatory equivalent for the individual life frustrated. Glen's own life, if we deign to examine it, had been forfeited as that of a scapegoat,—sacrificed throughout for what we call by agreement the good or convenience of others. There is no smallest victory but over dead, and for the most part, despised souls; good and evil inextricably interwoven, and man must march and be content. But let us not in our partial estimate forget that the despicable are also consecrate.

Shiel still walked beside the burn when others arrived.

CHAPTER IX.

RECONSTRUCTION.

ALTHOUGH life at the vicarage through those autumn and winter days might have offered few attractions to any of enterprising views, to the inmates condemned to it the apparent cloud and gloom was fraught with a compensating tranquillity pre-eminently satisfying to their sober instincts. There was no perceptible change in the methods of life there, but even the aspiring Ebba herself was cognisant of the subtle influence by which an irresistibly

debilitating dulness became a quick inspiring calm. Apart from this tacit source of vigour she found exceptional exhilaration in her own practical affairs. By the judicious commercial offices of her recovered friend Augusta, she was kept in unceasing toil, her talents having been speedily acknowledged in a manner just then as acceptable to her as any other, namely, a higher scale of remuneration. Shiel being now in her confidence, smuggling operations had become less exacting, and the library shelves were getting filled with proportionate rapidity. That this was without effect upon the taciturn clergyman is hardly to be supposed, but what the manner or extent of it there was nothing whereby to judge. The vicar's habits underwent no change.

Shiel continued his development now in what seemed a course of unruffled consistency. The unexpected termination to the main disquieting episode in his career had not affected his previous resolutions upon it. He had himself gone over to see James Gilholme, and had spent a night under the minister's roof. Whatsoever the aspect of the experience, it was unflinchingly encountered, and Shiel returned from the interview with calm, even dignified mien. Whatever the effect of those past incidents upon him, purely sentimental perturbation was not likely for long to form part of it. Vastly modified as the man's estimate of things undoubtedly was, there was still beneath it an inherent intellectual balance whereby elements could be rigorously adjusted with due

regard to their intrinsic weight and importance. When relieved from the merely practical issues, he relapsed into domestic courses, and outwardly all proceeded as if nothing extraordinary had happened. By Ebba and the clergyman no word was ever offered with reference to these affairs. About a fortnight later, when Shiel and his sister were together as usual in the evening, the latter remarked,

‘ Handsel is going to live with James, she tells me.’

‘ Oh, that’s right,’ exclaimed Shiel, with emphatic concurrence; and no more was said.

It had to all seemed needless to harrow the bereaved husband with irrelevant antecedent details. That Glen had, since their critical encounter on Magdalen

Bridge, succumbed to an inordinate passion for her disinterested benefactor was fully in the knowledge of Handsel, and her particular account of the girl's movements with reference to Shiel in London, coupled with the latter's unreserved account of his communications leading to the final meeting, seemed explanation enough of the closing tragedy. It is scarcely necessary to remark that neither of Shiel's last notes had been previously disclosed to the minister, and on this account his wife's sudden and inexplicable flight had inspired him with extremest bewilderment. That, at least, succeeding disclosures had been able to obviate, but of the ineffaceable spiritual shock we will not speak.

In face of such extremities, Handsel of course knew no wavering as to her

necessary action. She had come to her brother immediately, and in his expressed desires had instantly acquiesced. Henceforth his manse was to be her home.

Although thus prompt in meeting all personal demands upon her, Handsel was not to relinquish one jot of her piquant personality. Under her brother's roof she was allotted her own private chamber, and in any matters of a strictly pastoral nature she only stipulated to conform so far as to herself seemed desirable. Disquieting as in some respects this originally proved to James, time and habit materially blunted its edge. Even to him the essential orthodoxy of his sister could not but through her movements be perceptible, and towards mere difference of method he was to find a daily increasing tolerance. For himself he

could only still further intensify his spiritual ministrations, which were daily received with additional acceptance by his flock. Thus here as at Linnbrig days passed, and time imparted his own inevitable balm—an imperceptible over-growing of the past.

If it were needed, perhaps that tragic close to a course in which both Handsel and Ebba had been unavoidably interested served to add yet another link to the friendly chain by which these two were bound. Although Ebba's horizon was widening to an unexpected degree, her attachment to this early friend knew no eclipse. Handsel's position and personality were in Abb's mind unique, such as circumstances could scarcely touch, save by way of confirmation or consistent development; whilst to Handsel, inevitably solitary as

she must remain, this earliest enthusiasm was little short of a religion. Thus it came that letters were multiplied between the vicarage and the distant manse.

The letters which Ebba received were occasionally handed to Shiel for his perusal, and a few general words would be exchanged thereupon, but Shiel displayed no particular interest either in the compositions themselves or the writer of them. Not externally at least,—if in his long silent occupations on the hills they recurred to him by way of suggestive association, nobody knew of it. Shiel spent much of his time out on the hills, not always alone and not always absolutely idle. He had displayed an increasing assiduity in visiting that pastoral friend of his, by name Robert Carr, a

neighbouring shepherd. Some time before Christmas, indeed, these visits had assumed a systematic aspect, although beyond that blunt announcement to his sister that he should 'become a shepherd and marry Glen,' there had been nothing whereby Shiel's movements could be interpreted. Ebba, when pondering the subject, justly considered that the frustration of one part of the project did not of necessity involve the abandonment of the other. She did not suppose that her father would have observed so indeterminate a movement, until one morning, requiring Shiel's aid in the garden, he came to seek his son, and heard that he was out.

'With Carr, no doubt,' remarked the clergyman, retiring.

'No doubt,' said Ebba.

It was some time after that, when they chanced to be alone in the dining-room, that the father and son had a conversation, a significant one. It began indifferently upon apples; but from that drifted rapidly to other problems of the soil, and so reached at last a personal tone.

‘I find that I am definitely pledged to the country, father,’ Shiel had said, ‘and I believe to this particular district.’

‘Very likely,’ responded the vicar, calmly. ‘I know it can exercise a vital influence of that sort; over a peculiarly sympathetic form of imagination, of course.’

‘Precisely,—an imagination lacking materially sundry human elements for one thing.’

‘That is it, Shiel.’

‘Through this I have solved the inevitable question of employment. I have an uneasy feeling that it will be a blow to you, after the sacrifices you have made on my behalf.’

The vicar waved his hand in deprecation of this apologetic tone.

‘I think of being a shepherd,’ continued Shiel. ‘Most men of what we call education leave this country when they so resolve, but this soil is necessary to my existence, so I shall seek employment here.’

His father regarded him silently for a moment.

‘I have no doubt whatever of the propriety and wisdom of your resolution,’ said he, at length. ‘I have had other thoughts, you know, but solely on your

behalf, Shiel. This meets with my entire concurrence, when so deliberately concluded. I had not thought that your disposition would be so nearly resembling my own. This lack of human elements,' proceeded the clergyman, with more fervour than he ordinarily displayed, 'in other words, this social outlawry of which you speak has been something of a perplexity to myself through life. It is a radical matter, and I am heartily glad that you have been able to solve it thus early.'

'It is a radical matter, father, but why a perplexity?' asked Shiel.

'Not to you, I hope, not to you. You live under a later dispensation.'

The clergyman began to show some incipient perturbation, so Shiel left the matter.

‘No doubt in a few years I shall be able to procure some small sheep farm for myself up here, but in the meantime I shall take ordinary employment.’

‘Certainly. With regard to the farm, I shall take that responsibility upon myself when you think the time is fitting. Ebba and I are now saving out of my stipend a clear hundred a year, so that it is only a matter of a few years.’

Ebba herself here unexpectedly entered, so that the conversation was changed.

It was not until the spring that Shiel’s purpose was fully accomplished; but then he was successful in procuring a situation such as he desired. A gentleman from the lower part of the county, who was adding unto his acres the tenancy of an extensive moorland farm a few miles from

Linnbrig, readily availed himself of the proffered services of this odd Oxford graduate, and at once installed him as responsible factotum in these outlying possessions.

Shiel entered with zest upon his new duties, and found, as he would assert in letters to his constant friend Smart, definite respite in the purely material labour which each day inevitably presented. Day after day added to his placid acquiescence in the common lot, and chimerical speculation seemed in danger of becoming extinct before the gross progress of muscular development. But it was not in this man's power to repose wholly upon the animal facts of creation. There was an imaginative substratum which was not to be concealed. Although he still loathed

a pen with a more than schoolboy hatred, he read extensively, and indulged his creative faculties in silent communion with the wild nature which surrounded him.

In such communion, even in the course of his daily labours, for the most part also solitary, his mind was frequently involved in associations of past years, and those with increasing persistency, in which his childish playmate Handsel had a prominent part. He would contemplate those far-off occasions (farther much in mental association than mere lapse of days) upon which he had encountered her, engaged in just such solitary labour; and he would recall for calm examination the impatient mood in which he had then regarded the singular spectacle. Under this later dis-

pensation he was pleased to discern what seemed distinct elements of heroism in her silent behaviour, arousing in him now other than impatience, and he frequently pondered them. Once or twice, when he trudged over to the vicarage, he would casually ask Ebba how her friend fared, but the conversation was never protracted.

Shiel had been at his occupation for a whole year, and as yet showed no symptoms of any fresh disillusionment, when, coming one Sunday to pass an hour or two with his father, unexpectedly he found Handsel a temporary member of the household. Entering the room to see her there, he was conscious of a definite sensation, not recognisable exactly as pleasure or pain, but consisting of some subtle complexity, in which that additional figure was

unaccountably involved. He conversed with her as with the others, in no wise differently, and in due course departed. Throughout the following week he found his labours to have lost just the least measure of their attractiveness, but he hardly knew why, and of course he permitted no shadow of alteration in his practical bearing. The next Sunday he went again to Linnbrig, but Handsel was not there, and Shiel recognized instantly his definite disappointment. He actually spoke to Ebba about it.

‘I hoped you had kept Handsel,’ he said, lightly.

‘Some pastoral difficulty?’ was her dry inquiry.

Their eyes met and they laughed.

‘I have this week discovered that she is pleasant to talk to.’

‘She is, Shiel,’ said Ebba, and they altered the subject.

It was when her brother was departing that Abb accompanied him to the gate to speed him on his way. They had said good-bye, and he was turning to leave her, when, hearing some words, Shiel refaced.

‘You really like to see Handsel?’

‘Unmistakably. You will let me know when she comes again?’

Ebba said yes, and they parted.

A month, however, had to elapse before Shiel’s desire was to be accomplished; then one beautiful summer morning he came, and Handsel was again awaiting him. Ebba would readily have confessed to the

innocent manœuvre this time. Apart from any personal predilection in herself, she had even in the days of her fullest ambition on behalf of Shiel viewed Handsel as the appropriate dispeller of his metaphysical fogs; and although there had been sundry episodes in the progress to that end which Abb would gladly have seen away, still she could look upon life with a calm philosophy, and accept ends without too rigid a perusal of the intervening means. Handsel (her subtle friend suspected) had been sufficiently construed, therefore Ebba looked with a clear conscience upon an undertaking novel in her personal experience hitherto.

That Handsel was affable and without restraint in the presence of Shiel, any ordinary observer could have readily per-

ceived : the broader deduction which Ebba had seen good to draw must have been based upon subtler grounds not commonly perceptible. For instance, in the afternoon sun, as they now sat in the vicarage garden conversing of the most diverse topics, nobody would easily have suspected sentimental predicaments in connection with anyone of the three personages there assembled. And yet Handsel's merely physical beauty was now by no means to be ignored. The same calm outlook upon the whole material world was presented by her intelligent gaze. At fitting moments Shiel himself remarked it, and found it offer a more and more determinate appeal to perceptions of his own.

‘It is a wholly individual matter,’ he was observing in reply to something that

Handsel had said. 'In the perception of this lies the secret to everything. Miss Lavington is far too dogmatic.'

It was noticeable that much of Shiel's magisterial utterance was returning to him.

'You, for instance, Handsel, must have driven her wild,' he added, turning towards her.

'I have no doubt.'

'To assert that there is any natural duty in involving oneself in a wholly unnatural imbroglio, is more than preposterous. Even you, Abb, agree to that.'

'By all means.'

'For a one-armed creature to persist in going to fight, out of some ridiculously theoretic impression, is simply suicide.'

'"Shun the evil which we cannot heal,"' interposed Abb.

‘For some, undoubtedly——’ and Shiel paused, looking over the hills before him.

‘Do you remember that evening at the Savoy, Handsel?’ next he cried, and laughed resonantly. ‘What a fool I was! Did you suspect it at the time?’

‘I did,’ said Handsel, and Ebba, moving, joined her laugh. ‘He progresses,’ mused she.

‘Why didn’t you tell me so?’

‘I am not what you call dogmatic.’

‘No, you are not. That was what used to enrage me. If you had been more so I—I should——’

‘Have knocked me down.’

‘Metaphorically, I suppose I should. And yet you don’t know how your attitude has always haunted me.’

‘Even to aggravation. But I never had an attitude.’

‘No, I suppose not. But, oh, how you must have despised me!’

‘I don’t remember it.’

Shiel boldly examined the lines of her face for an instant as she said this.

‘Really, Handsel?’ he said, in a calmer tone; but she made no answer, and there was a brief silence.

When Shiel broke it, he enlarged upon this and that object in the landscape, sympathetically, enthusiastically.

‘Don’t you ever have an intolerable longing for all of them?’

‘I understand what you mean.’

‘Why don’t you come here oftener? You know why I never care to come over to James’s. And yet, Handsel, a few words with you are very acceptable to a banished man.’

Handsel expressed her sense of Mr. Wanless's kindness in tolerating her as frequently as he did.

'They why shouldn't I write to you? Would you object?'

'You have known me since I was a child.'

He, looking at her, extorted a smile.

'I have, Handsel, to my everlasting benefit.'

Ebba and the vicar came across the grass to join them.

Shiel did not return over the moors until it was moonlight, and he heard the plovers crying—a sound to him fraught with association. It made him unusually blithe.

CHAPTER X.

EBBA'S KEY.

ALTHOUGH Mr. Cuthbert Smart had failed to induce either father or son of the Linnbrig household to undertake the duties of that ancestral rectory of his which seemed to have fallen in so opportunely, the complacent gentleman did not therewith permit his amicable intercourse with the family to suffer any diminution. With Shiel, for instance, he persistently corresponded, in spite of the infrequent and wholly inadequate responses which for

a long time alone he was able to extract.

Such intercourse with other members of the household as Cuthbert was confessedly anxious to perpetuate he found much more difficult of accomplishment. After the unmistakable betrayal of his personal attitude towards Ebba, and the equally unmistakable attitude which that young lady had seen good to assume towards all his delicate advances, it was hardly possible to sustain any great degree of direct intimacy, even through the vicarious services of a sister. How was it possible, for instance, for Miss Wanless to accept invitations to that congenial circle at Craven Hill, or for herself to press upon any individual in it the attractions of her own secluded home? Despite all difficulties, however, intercourse of a kindly sort did

manage to subsist, not merely for a month or two, but positively for two whole years. After that time, through the innocent instrumentality of Shiel, (who had then acquired an independent domicile for himself,) personal intercourse was once again established. Shiel invited Smart to visit *his* hermitage, and Cuthbert, with marked alacrity, accepted the invitation.

Ebba had declined so much as to approach the domain of sentiment in the company of Mr. Smart. That had been so sufficiently obvious that the gentleman had never attempted to lead her in that direction again. And yet no amount of analysis or reflection could convince the suitor that his suit had been definitely rejected. His opinion of Ebba was such that he would have deemed it impertinent

to impugn the discretion of her resolution, but that it was purely a temporary one, and without any shadow of relation to her personal estimation of himself, he had an ineradicable conviction. Thus it was that he had been able to treat even this vital consideration with all his habitual patience and complacency.

It chanced that Cuthbert's visit to Shiel succeeded so closely his acceptance of the invitation, that Ebba's first intimation of the approaching encounter was the apparition of Mr. Smart himself in the vicarage pathway, in the company of her brother. It was mid-morning, and she had risen casually from her table, as she often did in the course of her labours, to throw a glance upon the moorland prospect outside, and as she reached the window she

looked directly into the upturned face of Mr. Smart. Ebba was so utterly taken aback that she could make no effort to withdraw, so, blushing and tremulous as she was, she could but return at that distance the visitor's polite greeting. She looked at herself hurriedly in a little mirror, touched this and that, particularly it seemed the loose hair about her temples, then stood expectantly to listen by the door. She heard them enter; then Shiel's voice called up to her. Thereupon Ebba ran down.

‘What a surprise!’ was all she could say, as she placed her hand in the one held out to her.

‘Is it?’ said Smart, letting her hand go. And they walked into one of the rooms. What little restraint any may have felt

at such an unlooked-for meeting was speedily dispelled, and Ebba led the conversation freely. In a minute or two the vicar came in, thinking that it was Shiel only with his sister. The gentleman stared at Cuthbert, then positively relaxed into a smile.

‘ Mr. Smart, I am glad to see you.’

From Mr. Wanless, and said as he uttered it, this was no mere formality.

A short time passed in easy pleasantry; then, in reply to his sister, Shiel having expressed his original design of sharing their dinner, if they had any, Ebba went away to exercise her ingenuity on a scanty larder. The clergyman took his visitors into the garden.

Cuthbert stayed with Shiel a week, a hot, fine week, the last of August. They

spent their time in an idle, primitive manner, walking on the hills so far as pastoral duty required, but for the rest seeking some shaded spot beneath a rock or alder-tree by the burn, metaphorically carving out dials quaintly point by point, and drawing therefrom inexhaustible topics of discussion or argument. How far such topics were of a directly personal nature we need not inquire, but that such had at least been definitely touched upon, concluding circumstances seemed to imply.

Shiel displayed positive importunity in the proposition that his sister should spend the bulk of one day at his farm-house on the hills, and the young lady at length concurred. It chanced to be Cuthbert's last, and a hot, hazy, lazy day it was. The sun smote powerfully those bald, grassy

hills, and there was only the gentlest breath from the western heights to stir the heated air. Only in the direct zenith did the blue infinity appear, elsewhere it was dimmed by the hazy veil amidst which clumps of solid white and grey clouds appeared, floating lazily on their journey. Horizons were obscure, and the hills towards them showed but their dim, dark outlines only. A few flies were in the air; a bee boomed past occasionally in disappointing search, and a panting sheep would bleat; but there was no bird; all else as still and silent as a placid sea.

The day had been spent in accustomed philosophic idleness. Shiel never indulged in what we commonly call sport, further at least than the acquisition of a seasonable dish of trout for breakfast. Mr. Smart

was not quite so punctilious, and had condescended, during his brief sojourn here, to supplement the table occasionally from the moors adjacent. He had done so on this particular day, not returning from his labour until Ebba had been some time expectant. He came in alone, and handed his bag to Handsel, naturally commenting upon the heat. Having withdrawn for a few minutes, he reappeared fresh and placid as ever.

‘Where did you leave Shiel?’ asked Ebba.

‘On the top of Gledhope: I came down the cleugh.’

‘I believe you enjoy it, Mr. Smart,’ said the young lady, smiling at what seemed something of an incongruity.

‘Only *believe*, Miss Wanless?’ was the

mock indignant rejoinder. 'I never got the real spirit of your land before. Now that I have got it, I am like a man regenerate. You eye the gun?' laughed he. '*Degenerate*, you think?'

'By no means. I cannot fancy you gloating over your thousand brace; that only is degenerate, despicable.'

Cuthbert gave his grateful response silently, from the eye.

In such light and pleasant converse something more than an hour passed; then Shiel came in, and soon they all had a meal. In the afternoon Shiel turned antiquary for the nonce, and was highly solicitous that his friend should examine, before leaving, the traces of a Roman highway which traversed the hills hard by, and upon which Ebba was a recognized

authority. There was, of course, nothing which Mr. Smart had so eagerly looked forward to, so all four set out—Handsel being of the party.

Ebba went forth in resigned, even solemn contentment, despite the high fatality which she knew to hover in that hazy, burdened atmosphere. It was hardly likely that anybody present could think her hoodwinked, so no doubt her acquiescence was construed to be a favourable omen. At any rate, it was obvious enough that spirits ran high, and that for the present was sufficient.

When resources were thus seriously tested, it was astonishing how much historical and archæological lore could be mustered amongst them. By remarkably good hap, Mr. Smart's attention had been

only recently drawn to this very subject of Roman antiquities, in consequence of some discoveries just made on his Dorsetshire estate, and he had looked into one or two standard books on the subject. Shiel did not disguise his astonishment, but Ebba naturally did her delight. Mr. Smart was never foolish, for curiously enough, of what he did not know he never by any chance took upon himself to speak; but his display upon the present occasion implied much more than merely negative virtue. Although it was by no means for his scholarship that Ebba favoured Cuthbert, the betrayal of any qualifications in that direction were naturally not unacceptable to her.

The critical examination of the more or less obscure track over the grassy should-

ers was made in great good-humour, and not wholly without sympathetic allusion to influences of a more recent and more permanent description. There was much imaginative suggestion also amongst them, and the time and place favoured its development. It was without the slightest surprise or resentment that Ebba ultimately found herself engaged in some disquisition of this latter kind in the company of Mr. Smart alone. Shiel and his wife were not out of sight, but they were apparently on their homeward journey, and another fifty yards would place a green undulation between the two sections of the party. When Ebba perceived it she simply said,

‘ We had better follow.’

Cuthbert at once acquiesced, and they walked on talking.

‘I was sure of that,’ said he, with some emphasis. ‘You must of necessity require some intellectual tonic from time to time. In justice to your labours, Miss Wanless, you ought to take it.’

‘Oh, yes, I do sometimes.’

‘But you have never been to London since——’

‘No,’ laughed Ebba. ‘Does London monopolize all intellectual tone?’

‘By no means, but you have yourself told me that nothing else is such a stimulant to you individually.’

Cuthbert followed up his words with a glance, and he saw his companion colour.

‘Isn’t it so?’

‘Yes, certainly.’

‘And you persistently avoid the place, or rather certain people in it?’

‘Circumstances have not been favourable to my absence from home. I shall come up again some day.’

‘To stay with us?’

‘Perhaps.’

‘Not perhaps, Miss Wanless,’ urged Smart. ‘Since that evening of course I know the difficulty, but need it continue? Will you not give us once and for all the right of having you again in our household? Years do not alter my conviction. I do not think that I am an impatient, nor yet an inquisitive mortal. I will ask no limit, pry into no reserve. Only say that I may continue to love you, and that perhaps some day you will try to return it.’

With that there would surely be no obstacle to our meeting, even interchanging domiciliary visits—would there?’

‘Mr. Smart, you are inexpressibly good and kind to me,’ returned Abb, with heightened colour. ‘But to one of your position in life, a prolonged engagement, and what else could we have but that? would be an unmitigated wrong and evil. I had hoped that you had by now quite forgotten that little passage in which I was concerned?’

‘Hoped, Ebba?’ said he, and the young lady blushed crimson.

‘Let them say what they will, *we* will not turn hope into a fugitive of that colour. Had I been able to think that you had ever *hoped* that, the world would have been revolutionized to me, and some

definite step would have been long since taken. But I cannot think it. And why should a long engagement be so fatal to one of my illustrious extraction? Am I therefore to be debarred from the only really sacred incentive to a daily life? You are not worldly, my dear Miss Wanless, and in promoting such an argument you do yourself great wrong. Be assured I repudiate it vehemently. Do you think it would be little to me to have the right to a letter from you, even an occasional actual glimpse of you?’

‘That you shall have,’ said Ebba, with dignified directness, returning his ardent gaze.

‘I shall?’ said Cuthbert, standing before her. ‘And your hand with it.’

Abb extended her hand, and her com-

panion taking it in his own, placed his lips upon it. Presently they went on again.

This was all of a strictly confidential nature that passed upon this occasion. Their conversation thereafter presented a more personal, more intimate glow, certainly, but of a generally imaginative kind only. Shiel construed their countenances favourably, and acknowledged an infinite contentment. He and Cuthbert together, walking one upon each side of her, accompanied Ebba home, and in the deep twilight the two men returned over the hills, talking earnestly.

Weeks and months again elapsed after this momentous incident. Ebba had a correspondent added to her restricted num-

ber, but, for the rest, life proceeded with her very much as it had done. She and her father sustained their life of mutual reticence, but for long now both had been conscious of an access of feeling pervading their domestic atmosphere. Of the remarkable attitude of Mr. Wanless to his children generally, we have had some glimpse, and of all perhaps the culmination was reached in that silent regard (extending positively over years) of the self-sacrificing behaviour of his daughter. Shelf after shelf of that vanished library had been filled and re-arranged, up to within some half-hundred of the more uncommon volumes which took longer to unearth; and yet no syllable, no remotest glance of mutual intelligence had been exchanged between the two persons, in

daily contact, who were parties to such a vital experience. Mr. Wanless paced his library floor, it is true, in ever-increasing emotion, but within those precincts the whole of his emotion was consumed. Once beyond the portal, he was the same self-contained, imperturbable individual that he had ever been.

For months now Ebba's additions had of necessity been but by one and one, still they had dribbled on. There was, however, now at last one important modification of the predicament, namely, that the clergyman had resolved that the time was come when he must take some resolute step in the matter. The proposed method of it was somewhat characteristic. The gentleman determined to catch his daughter in the act of replacing, and he had

not been immediately able to do it. Suspicion naturally pointed to night-time as the available moment, chiefly perhaps on account of his daughter's having habitually been the last to retire, so he had at length simply set himself to watch. When he withdrew for the night he took extreme measures for following the movements of Ebba. Thus at length the end came.

One night, Abb having occasion for a surreptitious journey, adopted her usual measures,—measures which, through the whole period of her enterprise, with the solitary exception of that night with Shiel, had never failed. Having descended the stairs when all the house was still, and unlocked the door with her accustomed scrupulous care, she sought the place for her volume, a matter now of increasing

difficulty. At a momentary thought she paused to throw a complacent regard upon the ample shelves. No doubt they suggested many things, for if there had been possible doubt before, it was now flagrantly certain that they formed a very definite element in her conscious life. From this unsuspecting reverie the young lady was aroused,—at first merely physically startled by an unexpected sound. She stepped to the door to listen, when her whole frame quivered at the unmistakable tread of her father's slippers upon the stairs. In them there was no suspicion of stealth; rather were they consciously regulated, it seemed, with respect to their emphasis than their attempted suppression. Ebba's candle was upon the table, and towards it she withdrew,

assuming a position of simply natural expectancy.

The steps came on in the same measured tread, until the listener was aware that the bottom of the stairs had been reached. Had the hearts of either permitted it, father and daughter might have heard each other's breath, so silent was the night outside and in. The pace was again resumed, and the door moved further open.

‘Is that you, father?’ asked Ebba.

‘It is, Abb. What are you doing up so late, and in my preserves?’

‘Mr. Smart wishes to marry me: do you object?’

The almost ludicrous incongruity, so gravely uttered, and with no facial alteration beyond a slight heightening of colour, brought the clergyman inevitably to a

pause. Even he had not been prepared for such consummate attitude. He regarded his daughter with speechless emotion.

‘Mr. Smart . . .’ at length he muttered.

‘What—what is the volume, Nabbs?’

‘The *Lytell Geste*. I forget where it goes.’

‘Six B., fourth from the end,’ was the mechanical response.

Ebba walked to the place directed, and made room for the particular treasure. Then she refaced her father.

‘Mr. Smart . . .’ said he again. ‘I always liked the man. He is old-fashioned, Abb.’

‘I believe he is; and I, you mean, am new?’

‘No, I did not mean you to infer that.

I spoke strictly in reference to Mr. Smart.
He—he——'

But the voice of the imperturbable clergyman misgave him; it quavered and ceased; then silently the father clasped his daughter to his breast. When they withdrew, the books had not again been referred to.

An hour later Ebba leaned from her open bed-room window, looking out upon the silent summer night, the steep opposing slope being clear in the moonlight, every smallest bush or rock throwing on the ground beside it the blackest of shadows, which was more obvious than the solid object itself. The burn babbled its ceaseless song to the moon, and perhaps this one human listener could also inter-

pret it, for she had heard it often and with care. Before she withdrew, Ebba flung her duplicate key as far as she could towards the water, and, although she strained eye and ear in its pursuit, she could neither hear nor see it fall. At last the maiden sought her rest, and the moon rode on alone.

CHAPTER XI.

‘NEAR NEEBORS O’ THE STARNS.’

To the south of the Linnburn stretched wide, undulating ridges of dark heather; the hills to the north were huge, round uplands of smooth grass, intersected by deep sinuous passes through which rills and stony burns babbled. About three miles from the Linnbrig vicarage in this latter direction, on an open terrace with such a bare grassy defile below it, and a steep green shoulder immediately behind,

stood the sheep-farm of Whauplandlee. The house was a cold grey building with a roof of brilliant tiles, a clump of battered trees on its north-west side, and a few acres of reclaimed tillage walled in on the east. A month or two ago the spot seemed bleak and desolate enough, but in this first June sunshine, and amidst the quickening sounds and fragrance which the rays had been able to summon, it could present an aspect of life primitive enough, but by no means blank or dreary. Such was at last the vagabond's haven.

This negative perception would indeed have appeared something more than inadequate to the one solitary consciousness which alone at that moment was directly engaged with the scene. On the track ascending the wide slope immediately

before the house was a sombre figure on horseback, whose eyes were now upon the slackened bridle, now upon the various surroundings illumined by the sunshine, as his steed trudged patiently along, apparently in as deep contemplation as the meditative rider himself. Even the iron foot-fall was scarcely audible, and afforded but a dull measured accompaniment to the other varieties of silence by which the place was held. A bird-voice would travel fitfully upon the western breeze, the plaint of a lamb would come, and on passing this scattered gorse the bees crooned their laborious satisfaction in the sunny part allotted to them. If the vicar did not particularly note each subtle constituent, every one of them had a place in the general effect which all at that moment

wrought upon him. But that he was more minutely observant than might at once have appeared probable a single characteristic movement was enough to determine. As he traversed the grass at some two or three hundred yards from the dwelling, his eyes at that moment to the ground, he reined in his horse, and for the space of at least a minute his gaze remained fixed upon something which had excited his attention. He positively relaxed into a smile, and he half muttered an ejaculatory comment. What it was that engaged him might hardly have been determined by an onlooker. There was grass, and a sprinkling of young bracken, yes, and a wide company of mountain pansies whose bright yellow faces, scattered amongst the longer blades, the breeze had drilled to an odd

uniformity of posture, every eye fixed unblinking upon the morning sun; but there was nothing else to any ordinary vision. Presently Mr. Wanless moved on.

The house door was open, and as the clergyman fastened his bridle to a gate in the stone wall a diminutive figure appeared in the opening, which, after emitting some individual species of utterance, disappeared as abruptly as it had come, and the gentleman followed it in with undisturbed solemnity. Inside, some question was heard to be put in familiar accents, and but only incoherent answer elicited. The next moment Handsel herself greeted her visitor.

Externally the vicar was in no way altered. Development of circumstance had not been able, after a lifetime's taci-

turnity, to impart to him any extraordinary degree of demonstrativeness. Close and subtle inspection might no doubt have disclosed to the initiated radical modification of the spiritual forces, but the results were kept largely to himself. As he spoke composedly to Handsel, she proceeding with some domestic technicalities which engaged her, his eyes were frequently fixed in brilliant curiosity upon the figure which had first appeared to him, that of a dark-eyed maid of two, but beyond a more or less ungraceful flick of the fingers in her direction, rather suspiciously received, the clergyman made no attempt at personal familiarity.

It would have been difficult also to discern noticeable change in Handsel, beyond that chastening development of beauty

which, favourable conditions granted, early motherhood can alone impart. She had acquired no hint of the strictly sentimental complacency; any direction to, or correction of, her child being given with all her earlier promptitude and decision, equally with the more general remarks addressed to the reverend gentleman. She appeared a fit reflection of her material setting wherein no flagrant sophistication was apparent, nothing that was not in strict accord with the simplest elements of dignity and taste suggested by the patriarchal limits of her calling.

‘Have you put the horse up, Mr. Wanless?’ she asked, during the progress of their conversation.

‘Well, no’

‘You had better stay. Shiel will be

here at one. He is over the Passpeth head.’

‘I will, Handsel, thank you. I might as well see him . . . will you come, my little Nabbs?’

The inquiring face was fixed first upon the clergyman in serious doubt, then upon the observant mother. A head-shake followed. Handsel laughed.

‘Yes, go, darling,’ she said; and after a little more reluctance the child was persuaded.

To the empty saddle she was reconciled, and during the few minutes required to walk round to the back and make the horse comfortable in the stable, Mr. Wanless assiduously plied surreptitious methods, whereby the infantine complacency might be more fully diverted to himself. As the

child rode back in the gentleman's arms, he was presumably to some extent successful.

In the meantime one other figure was stalking over the sunlit bent, possibly also not without an eye to that brilliant tile roof, or even to the yellow pansies, but lingering over nothing. Except in a marked accession of physical vigour, Shiel also was much the same. There was a healthful glow on his features, and his eyes were brilliant, but there was also that inevitable tinge of mental reserve, which even the more or less successful handling of dimonts, hoggs, and gimmers, with all which such must import, had not been able to remove. Despite his supremely practical appearance, it is highly probable that even yet Shiel had not wholly divested himself

of theories. At any rate, he would occasionally take his child on to his knee, and, under pretence of some acceptable form of diversion, he would read very deeply, more or less by stealth, into the pair of glittering eyes. But what he found there he had not as yet disclosed ; for lack of other evidence we may suppose it theory.

He greeted his father affably and they talked of general things, but Shiel could perceive that it was not for this that the clergyman had come. Even Mr. Wanless’s features were apparently on this occasion not wholly under his control.

‘Mr. Smart comes next Wednesday, Shiel, and will stay a day or two with us. I do not suppose they will delay the marriage long. You will come down and have a word or two with him.’

‘Undoubtedly I shall,’ returned Shiel, not without a little fervour. ‘Old Cuddie the only man I could ever tolerate, to think of it coming to this!’

‘I was from the first pleasantly impressed by him——’

‘The best fellow that ever lived. But Abb needs it. She——’

‘She is not an ordinary girl,’ interposed the clergyman.

In this manner, enthusiastic and subdued respectively, did Shiel and his father expatiate to each other upon the various aspects of this matter, now at last approaching logical conclusion. In the face of Smart’s obvious partiality for Ebba throughout the years of their acquaintance, such a conclusion could surprise no one; but that Cuthbert should so heroically have sus-

tained the young lady’s extraordinary perversity, might legitimately excite some comment. As to the cause of the protracted delay there had not yet been any explanation, even between the lovers themselves.

The clergyman having disclosed his weighty mission, and partaken of his son’s mountain fare, had again to seek refuge in action; and his steed being saddled he went on his way, leaving Handsel and her husband to discuss the issues, as they should feel disposed.

In due course Mr. Smart arrived at the vicarage, placid and youthful as ever, but at favourable moments betraying a more or less exuberant vitality. It was in the course of the first evening that he spent under the roof, when Shiel had gone, that Mr. Wanless bade Cuthbert come with

him to inspect his library. As they turned to leave the room, the clergyman beckoned his daughter to accompany them.

‘In a minute or two, father,’ said Abb, and the others went on.

From his chimney-piece the vicar produced a box of cigars, from which Mr. Smart (a connoisseur) selected one.

‘You will excuse me, Mr. Smart; I have never smoked If you please. It will christen the books.’

‘Surely not the first ever lit in the room.’

‘Not exactly that; but the first ever offered to these individual books. Yes, observe them well.’

Cuthbert walked up to the shelves and examined a title here and there. Ebba did not come.

'You say that you have sought my daughter's hand for some years.'

Smart named the number.

'You have never attributed her conduct to disinclination to you personally, and I hope not to caprice?'

'I could never account for it by either.'

'Then here at last is the secret, Mr. Smart.'

Abb's task was explained frankly to the visitor—its cause and the manner of its fulfilment.

'By her work alone, mind. Not a farthing out of her household expenditure. Now you know whom you have chosen for a wife.'

The two looked at each other for a few seconds in silence.

‘Tend her carefully, Cuthbert,’ added Mr. Wanless, turning away.

Presently Abb came in, and the three spent the remainder of the evening surrounded by the books. From that night the library was definitely re-opened.

As the clergyman had foreseen, this proved the conclusion of the delay, and but a few weeks were to elapse before he himself was to perform the concluding ceremony, quietly conducted in his own remote church, to the babble of the Linnburn.

‘Five yet remain, father,’ whispered Ebba, as she mounted to be driven away to her wider world.

The clergyman said something, and even smiled.

‘ They shall be found,’ added Mr. Smart, who was nearer than they thought.

The last glimpse of them all, waving after her in the summer sunlight, with the dark pine wood behind, and the moorland ridges over it, would form a memory for Abb, and that Shiel and Handsel were the last to see her would doubtless not be forgotten.

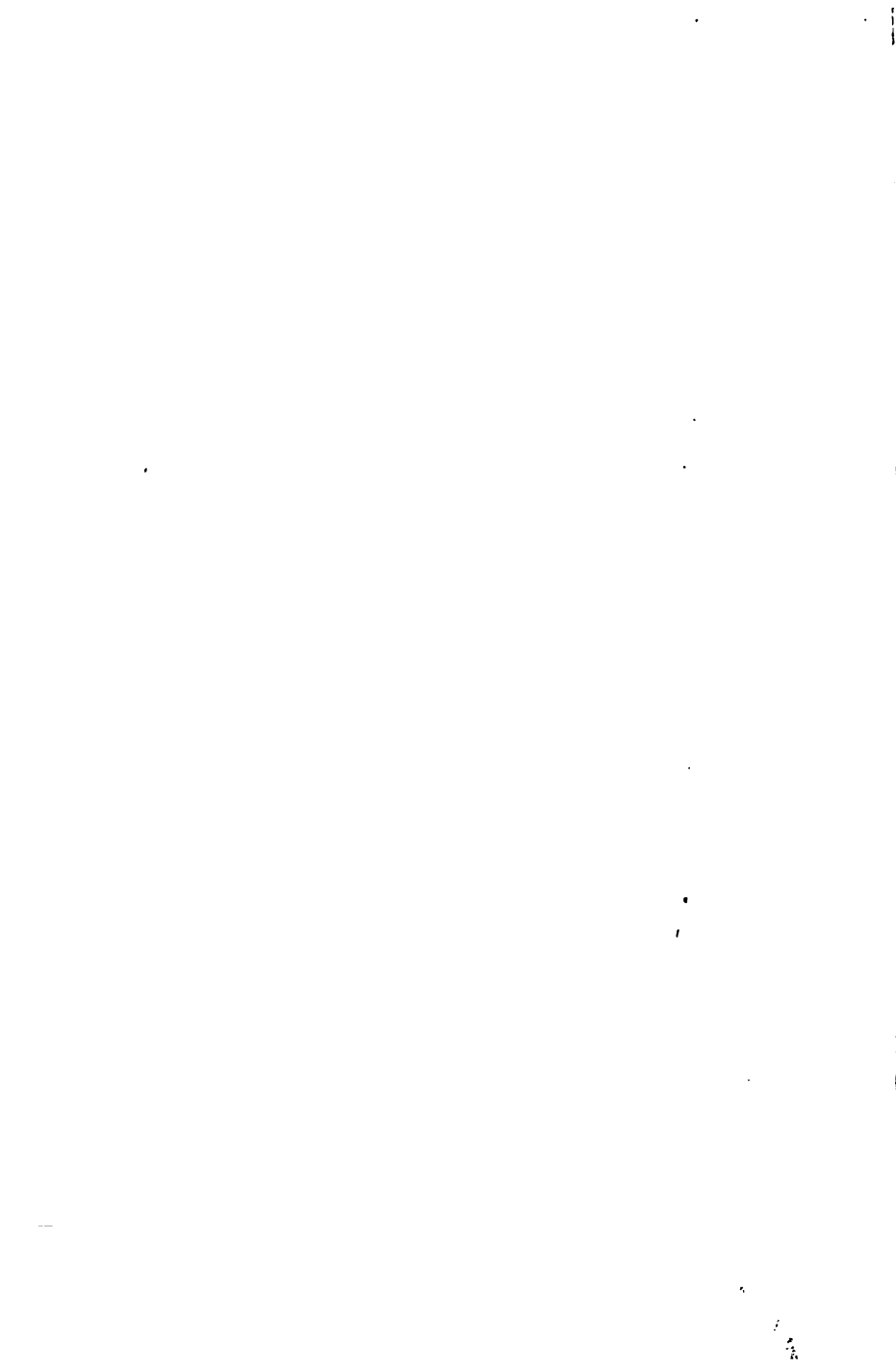
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